



PHILLIP KASSEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MENTAL HEALTH LEGAL ADVISORS COMMITTEE

an independent agency under the Massachusetts Judiciary

100 Hancock Street • Suite 1002 • Quincy • Massachusetts • 02171
Main 617.338.2345 • Fax 617.338.2347 • www.mhlac.org

MHLAC asks for your support on an important bill that would make key improvements to one of our most important public safety mechanisms: parole. ***An Act to Promote Equitable Access to Parole (H.2694, Rep. Sabadosa)*** will improve the efficiency and balance of the Parole Board, account for the rights and needs of persons with disabilities, improve transparency, and reduce the amount of time incarcerated people must wait between parole reviews. It will require incarcerated people to be granted parole at their parole eligibility date unless the Parole Board determines they would violate the law if released under appropriate conditions. The bill ensures that parole conditions will be individualized and, to ensure successful reentry, no stricter than necessary. It protects people from being re-incarcerated for technical (non-criminal) parole violations. For persons on parole more than three years without violating the law, this bill would create a presumption in favor of parole termination. Key components include:

- **Accounting for the Rights and Needs of Prisoners with Disabilities:** This bill calls for the Parole Board to provide a range of increased protections to people with disabilities.
- **Composition/Size of the Parole Board:** This bill increases the Parole Board from seven to nine members and requires that at least four members have 5+ years of experience in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, social work, and/or substance use disorder treatment. At least one member must be a formerly incarcerated individual who has completed the parole process.
- **Standard for Parole Review:** This bill requires that people up for parole are to be released at the time of parole eligibility unless clear and convincing evidence shows they would violate the law if released under appropriate conditions.
- **Assistance with Medically Appropriate Placements:** This bill also calls for the Parole Board to notify the Department of Public Health (DPH) upon grant of parole to anyone who needs specialized care due to bodily infirmity and disease and who is unable to secure a home plan.
- **Increased Transparency and Equity:** Under this bill, all parole hearings would be recorded, recordings of lifer hearings would be public records, and all other recordings would be available to key stakeholders upon request. The Board would be required to adjust its policies and practices to prevent systemic disparate impact based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic characteristics.
- **Parole Conditions:** The bill provides that conditions of parole must be individualized, reasonably related to the underlying criminal conviction, and can't be any more restrictive than necessary to ensure the person can live safely in the community.
- **Technical (Non-Criminal) Violations:** More than 90% of people returned to prison for a parole violation are returned for non-criminal, “technical” violations. This bill would reduce needless incarceration by ensuring parole can be revoked only if the parolee has committed a new crime.
- **Special Commission on Structural Racism in Parole (SC-SRP):** This bill addresses many important recommendations generated by the SC-SRP.