

PAROLE ILLINOIS REGIONAL CHAPTERS

As a coalition of people inside and outside of prisons, we at Parole Illinois believe that good ideas can come from anyone. Therefore, while we will try to give you as much guidance as we can, we also want to give you the freedom to develop the strategy that works best for you to achieve the objectives set out below. (Those strategies that are the most effective will then be relayed to other chapters.) The more regional chapters of Parole Illinois we can organize, the more influence we will have as an organization, and the easier it will be to achieve our legislative objectives.

Chapter Objectives

1. Educate the local populace about the need for fair, inclusive, and retroactive parole in Illinois;
2. Convince the Illinois state senator and representatives from your district(s) to support legislation for parole that does not have categorical carve-outs (i.e. legislation that gives everyone an opportunity to at least be considered for parole.)

Requirements

Regional chapters are not required to produce any policy papers, promotional materials, etc. Those will be provided by Parole Illinois Central. The regional chapters can download all of the necessary materials at ParoleIllinois.org (under "Materials.") As new materials are developed, the regional chapters will be notified. Regional chapter members are required to sign the petition for a fair and inclusive parole system a. <https://paroleillinois.org/individual-support-for-fair-parole/>, to ensure that they receive all updates, emails, etc. Members will also be required to stay in contact with the other members in their chapter and coordinate their efforts to accomplish the two objectives noted above. Members must support an opportunity for parole for everyone (not that everyone will be paroled, just that all incarcerated men and women have the opportunity to convince the board that they pose no threat to society and deserve parole).

Regional chapters should strive to keep incarcerated friends and family members informed and try to collaborate with them.

Regional chapters cannot discriminate against anyone in their region who wants to join that chapter. Regional chapters should work to identify religious organizations (churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc.), activists, student groups, and others that may be interested in working towards a fair and inclusive parole system.

Regional chapters can post pictures, updates, and meeting notices on the Parole Illinois Facebook page.

Your First Meeting

The following are some suggestions for what you can do at your first meeting:

1. Identify the legislative district you live in and who the senator and representatives are from that district. (Note: since we are only dealing with Illinois law, you should focus solely on the Illinois General Assembly and Illinois Senate.) Look up the contact information--phone numbers, email and physical addresses, social media accounts, etc.--for each legislator.

2. Identify any resources your members can provide (meeting places, color copying capabilities, etc.).
3. Identify any personal relationships to:
 - a. Legislators;
 - b. Politicians;
 - c. Celebrities;
 - d. Activists;
 - e. Churches or other religious organizations;
 - f. Criminal justice reform groups;
 - g. Student groups.
4. Identify incarcerated men and women from your area.
5. Identify a point person for your chapter and relay that to Parole Illinois Central, along with a member list.
6. Read/discuss the materials provided by Parole Illinois.
7. Pick a date, time, and meeting place for the next meeting.
8. Set goals for the next meeting.
9. Start conceptualizing an event to raise awareness about your chapter or the need for parole.
10. Use the “Without Your Help _____ Will Die In Prison” sheet to take a photo with your incarcerated loved one’s name inserted.
11. Take group photos to post on the Parole Illinois Facebook page and other social media.
12. Work on developing your strategy for contacting, getting a meeting with, and convincing your district’s legislators to support parole. (Maybe work on personal letters to each one.)
13. People who are on Facebook can ‘like’ the Parole Illinois Facebook page.

Advice When Contacting Legislators

1. Identify yourself as a member of Parole Illinois _____ (whatever regional chapter you are with, e.g. “Parole Illinois Carbondale”) and as one of their constituents. (If you voted for them, you may want to tell them that as well.)
2. Tell them that we are working to reinstate a fair, inclusive, and retroactive parole system in Illinois.
3. Inform them as to why this issue is important to you. For example: you have a loved one incarcerated with an excessive sentence; you are sick of your tax dollars being wasted on mass incarceration while infrastructure crumbles and education and social services are under funded, etc.
4. Stress that parole would not let everyone in prison go free, but it would (and should) give everyone an opportunity to prove they deserve another chance and don’t pose any threat to society.
5. If writing/emailing them, you should include a copy of “Understanding Parole,” “Why Illinois Needs a Parole System,” and “Death by Incarceration in Illinois,” and request to meet them in person.
6. If meeting with them, you should leave them with your contact information, a copy of the zine, “Understanding Parole,” and flyer, “Death by Incarceration in Illinois.”

Enclosures

- a. “Understanding Parole”;
- b. “Why Illinois Needs a Parole System”;
- c. “Death by Incarceration in Illinois”;
- d. “Without Your Help _____ Will Die In Prison”;
- e. Zine by J. Dole and N. Petrowski, “Why Illinois Needs Parole”;
- f. “Incarcerated Activists Raise the Bar on Parole” (The Public i).