

## Parole Support Letter Tips

### **Step 1: Choose an appropriate format**

- A typed letter is preferable, but a handwritten letter is fine (just write legibly)
- Date your letter
- Address the letter to “Dear Board Members”

### **Step 2: Introduce yourself**

- State your name and, if relevant, your title, job, etc.
- Outline why you are writing this letter (e.g. “This letter is in support of X’s upcoming hearing for day parole”)

### **Step 3: Describe your relationship with the offender and why you think the offender is unlikely to reoffend or violate parole conditions**

- Outline how long you have known the offender for and in what capacity
- Describe the traits the offender has that make you believe the offender will not pose an undue risk to society or violate parole conditions
- Tell stories and give specific details!
- Note that a letter of support is generally not an appropriate forum to protest the offender’s innocence, minimize the offence, or rationalize it
- Instead, support letters should identify the offender’s shortcomings and mistakes, and then describe how the offender has taken steps to change
- If the offender has completed programming, avoided misconduct in prison, pursued educational opportunities, worked while in custody, etc., then those are accomplishments that might be worth highlighting

### **Step 4: Explain how you will support the offender’s rehabilitation**

- Remember, a support letter is not just a reference letter: it is to explain how you will support the offender in the community
- Discuss what specifically you will do to assist the offender (e.g. provide housing, financial support, friendship, employment, transportation, emotional support, etc.)
- Explain how you fit into the offender’s release plan

### **Step 5: Conclude your letter**

- Repeat that the offender has your support and quickly summarize why the offender should get parole
- Sign off with “Sincerely,”
- Write out your full legal name and sign the letter

## Support Letters

When it comes to support letters, quality means more than quantity. Support letters should generally come from three groups of people: your family, your friends, former employers, and potential employers. Support letters from former and potential employers should be on the company letterhead.

**Support Letters** should include the following:

1. State your name, age, and occupation. If you have been in the current job for a number of years, state the number of years you have been similarly employed.
2. State your relationship with the prisoner, how you know them and the length of time you have known him or her.
3. Your belief that, despite his/her mistake, he/she is a good person and the reason you feel this way.
4. Your belief that the offender will be a useful and law-abiding citizen if given the opportunity. You may describe improvements in the prisoner's attitude, behavior, or efforts he/she has made to improve himself/herself. If you will provide housing, give the address and a phone number if you have one. You can mention other kinds of help you can provide, for instance, clothing or transportation.

Please remember to sign your support letters.

## **ADDITIONAL TIPS ON WRITING SUPPORT LETTERS**

### **What is a letter of support?**

Letters of support are evidence that the participant will have a network of friends and family to help when he is released.

### **Why write a parole support letter?**

Inmates in the Texas prison system are encouraged by the Board of Pardons and Paroles to provide evidence of support for their release on parole. One way to do this is through letters supporting a participant's release.

### **What are the rules for writing a parole support letter?**

There are no rules for support letters. These are only guidelines and suggestions. You must use what fits your own special situation. Don't be afraid to ask people to write letters. Many people care and want to help.

### **What is the benefit of a parole support letter?**

A parole support letter shows: 1. Somebody knows the participant and cares about him. 2. The participant has free world support while in prison. 3. Someone will be there to help when he is released. 4. The good side of the participant to help balance the bad side which appears in his criminal record.

### **Who writes support letters?**

1. Family members, relatives, close friends and loved ones. 3. Respected members of the community, such as businessmen and religious leaders. 4. Prospective employers, school teachers, students, counselors, etc. 5. The participant's TDCJ supervisors or other people who have known him/her while in prison, e.g. chaplain, counselor, teacher, volunteers from the community.

If you can't find anyone who knows the participant, you may ask for letters from people who know you and state that your support will be of value during the participant's re-adjustment to the community. Also, people can write offering their support for the participant based on their position in the community (such as a minister in your church.).

## **How long should the letter be?**

The most important aspect of the letter is that it clearly states the nature of support—financial, vocational, residential, etc. Avoid lengthy petitions and letters which may take away from the most important details that need to be communicated.

## **Sample Letter Format and Content Suggestions**

Date:

In Reference to: {Inmate name and TDCJ number} – Parole Support Letter for His File {Inmate Address} {Inmate City, State and Zip}

Honorable Parole Board Members Review and Release Processing TDCJ Parole Division P.O. Box 13401, Capitol Station Austin, TX 78711

Dear Honorable Members of the Parole Board:

In the first section include:

Your name

Your age

Your occupation (If you have been on the same job for a number of years, state the number of years you have been similarly employed)

Your relationship with the participant (how you know him and for how long)

Note how often you visit the unit, how long you have been visiting the unit and how far is the drive for you to his unit. Also indicate how often you exchange letters and for how long you have been exchanging letters.

Note that this letter is intended to be a parole support letter for placement in his file.

In the second section include a description of why you believe the participant, in your opinion, deserves the chance for parole. Describe your belief that the participant, despite his mistakes, is a good person by providing reasons and examples of why you feel this way. You also want to convey your belief that he will be a useful and a law-abiding citizen given the chance. This can be accomplished using the following points:

Describe the presence of feelings of responsibility and remorse.

List accomplishments prior to his incarceration (ex: education, awards, substance abuse treatment, etc.)

Include improvements the participant has made since being incarcerated (ex: education, substance abuse treatment programs, philanthropic work, attitude, behaviors, etc.)

Think about what three-character attributes best describe your loved one and how those traits have developed during his incarceration and how they will help him upon his release.

In the third section include information that demonstrates to the parole panel that the participant has a support system in place upon release and has fully anticipated his post-release life. Include information regarding the following along with examples of the people who would provide that support. Make sure to highlight the areas where you plan to provide assistance and encouragement.

Employment/potential employment. Employment is generally a great deterrent to future arrests. Highlight the skills and work experience your loved one has had that will aid in him finding employment. If employment arrangements have already been made, have the employer send a detailed description of the employment situation.

Residence. Highlight how the residence of choice will aid in the rehabilitation and post-release success of your loved one. Include a picture, address and phone number, if available. You should indicate in your letter who will be providing living arrangements and the type of arrangements involved. Is this the prior address where the participant lived? Is the address in the same county where the crime occurred? If it is the same address as before, try to show why the prior crimes that occurred there won't happen again (greater family awareness, disassociation with people and activities with whom the client was previously involved, etc.). State whether rent will be involved, if there is a limited duration that the housing is available and who else will be living in the house.

Transportation. Will he have personal transportation, or will he ride the bus? This is a smaller issue and should simply state if a car is available. If it is your car that is being made available then you should indicate whether it can be used for all purposes, or just for going to and from work only.

Available treatment programs (as applicable). Addictions don't just go away. What is your loved one's plan for staying sober?

Accountability plan/support system: Explain the different types of accountabilities that will be in your loved one's life. The goal here is to show that he is being released into a loving environment with people who will also hold him accountable to the behaviors that he needs to adhere to upon release.

Clothing: Explain the plan for finding clothing support upon release.

Other information the writer feels would be helpful to the parole panel in making their decision.

Close the letter with a brief statement reiterating your belief in your loved one and provide contact information for any questions.

See the example below for a sample letter.

## SAMPLE SUPPORT LETTER

January 25, 2022

TDCJ Parole Division  
Attn: Correspondence  
PO BOX 13401  
Austin, TX 78711-3401

RE: William B. Good, TDC #00123456, Michael Unit

Dear Board of Pardons and Paroles:

My name is Leann Smith and I am writing on behalf of my brother, William B. Good, TDC #00123456. I am 38 years old and have been a retail manager at Good Will in Houston for 14 years.

While incarcerated, William completed his G.E.D. and started taking college courses in Automotive Technology. He always has a positive attitude when we visit or talk on the phone. He takes responsibility for the actions that led to his incarceration and shows considerable remorse for what he has done.

My husband and I are more than willing to provide William with every aspect of support, encouragement, and accountability to see him through a successful transition into a positive member of society. We have a guest room in our garage where William can stay, and we live one block away from the main bus station. The job market is booming in Houston. My husband can offer William direct employment at the auto repair shop upon William being granted parole.

William has worked very hard while he was incarcerated to make himself a better person and he deserves another chance in society. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Leann Smith