

The importance of having a lawyer for a parole review – CEO blog

A parole hearing and the process leading up to it is one of the most important periods in a prisoner's life. The decision will determine their freedom, and whether or not they can progress through the prison system.

For that reason, the Parole Board believes, and strongly advises, that every prisoner should have a legal representative to help them prepare, and represent them during the hearing itself. However, we are all too aware of the significant number of individuals who go through the parole process with no legal advice at all.

There are several reasons why we advise that legal representation is the best option for prisoners. Prison lawyers specialise in parole reviews. It can be a worrying, distressing and confusing time for offenders, making it difficult to prepare for alone. The parole review will affect how they serve the rest of their sentence and the process itself can be complicated and difficult to grasp. Legal firms are able to get vital information and documents needed for the review and can easily contact people involved in the case. They will also give advice on what to tell the Parole Board during the hearing and set out a full list of reasons why a prisoner may be suitable for release. Essentially, lawyers specialise in these areas and will help prisoners navigate through the process as well as offer expert advice on all matters relating to their parole review.

In 2013, law changes were brought in by the government which meant legal aid would no longer be available for certain prisoners going through a parole review. These changes were overturned following a legal challenge in 2018, meaning ALL prisoners were brought back into the scope of legal aid. Despite this, the Board still sees large numbers of prisoners go unrepresented through the parole process.

I believe it is therefore vital, in the interests of fairness, that the Board provides sufficient support and guidance to prisoners who chose to represent themselves. That is why we have published a new information booklet for prisoners representing themselves during their parole review.

As the Chief Executive of the Parole Board, my primary focus is to ensure that the Board is working efficiently and effectively and has the right strategy and priorities. When we make our decisions our sole focus is risk; and our number one priority is protecting the public and this is reflected in everything we do. It is also vital the Board ensures fairness to all, including the prisoner, during the parole process.

This new guide will give valuable advice on preparing for a parole review to ensure those offenders without professional legal assistance are in the best and most informed position possible to deal with the process. Whilst it is aimed at prisoners, it may also prove helpful to anyone supporting a

prisoner.