



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

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MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE PAROLE BOARD REPORT 2020

4th June 2021

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to the Legislature the Parole Board Annual Report 2020, as prescribed by section 8 of the Parole Board Act 2001. The Annual Report provides an overview of the decisions of the Board for the year, and offers suggestions and observations for the continued efficient delivery of Bermuda's parole regime.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will be aware that the Parole Board is an independent body, appointed by the Minister of National Security, empowered to make decisions governing the time and conditions of release of inmates from Bermuda's correctional facilities. In making its decisions, the Board must assess the risk offenders pose to the community and to themselves. Additionally, the Board evaluates the likelihood that a period of supervision, upon release, will contribute to the successful reintegration of the offender into the community.

Mr. Speaker, the Board is mandated to meet with all inmates who are eligible for parole three months prior to their Parole Eligibility Date. During 2020, the Board conducted 123 parole reviews and released 15 persons for parole during the period, 4 of which were fitted with an electronic monitoring device as part of their special condition. There were no denials of parole, however one individual was recalled. Eighty-four individuals had their parole decision deferred.

Mr. Speaker, forty-three inmates chose to decline parole. While some of these individuals expressed a desire to complete prison rehabilitation programmes, more often parole was declined due to an approaching earliest release date. Honourable Members will recall that inmates are traditionally eligible for release following completion of one-third of their court ordered custodial period, barring no other court stipulations are awarded, and no infractions against Prison Rules are documented.

Mr. Speaker, parole provides inmates with an opportunity for a supported re-entry into society. With tools to assist in transition back into the community, former inmates are less likely to reoffend. The stipulations of a formal parole order and the guidance of a parole officer assists former inmates with maintaining suitable housing and employment. Additionally, community based treatment, fiscal planning, and family reunification provide increased levels of support for the parolees when compared to those released with no supervision order.

Mr. Speaker, suitable housing and appropriate employment or education pursuits are the two elementary requirements for parole. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, all parolees released during 2020 were able to obtain suitable employment. During 2020, there were 7 foreign nationals incarcerated. Although foreign nationals are given the same consideration as locals in parole decisions, it is more difficult for foreign nationals to meet employment and housing criteria due to work permit requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the work of the Board was only minimally impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Site visits to the correctional facility were suspended, however the Board conducted 36 meetings at the Westgate Corrections Facility, Farm facility and the COED Facility on the scheduled meeting dates. The Board has utilized the government's Webex platform to meet virtually with potential parolees.

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful to the Board for bringing to my attention their thoughts and observations on issues that could affect Bermuda's parole regime going forward. The Board notes that there may be some difficulties with eligible inmates securing employment during the post Covid-19 economic recovery. There are many employers who consistently take a chance and employ these individuals, giving them a fair chance at a successful reentry. I would encourage all employers to consider assisting with the re-integration of parolees by hiring them as they are able.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Board, led by Chairperson, The Hon. Derrick V. Burgess, JP, M.P, for their diligent service. Parole is an important part of the Department of Corrections' programme. When released, parolees become our neighbors, colleagues, and friends. The work of the Board ensures that those eligible for release are supported throughout their re-integration process.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to lay Parole Board 2020 Annual Report before this Honourable House.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**