

# **Parole Support Letter Suggestions**

## PEP Family Program

Thank you for supporting your loved one through the parole process! This document is meant to be a compiled list of suggestions to help you construct a great letter to represent your loved one.

### **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 many support letters should I send?**

At the time of the parole interview, three to ten support letters should be enough. Keep sending support letters regularly (twice/year should be sufficient), not just at the parole interview date. This shows consistency and active support and lets the Parole Board know that you'll stick by the participant after release.

### **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.

**Where should I send the letter?**

Send letters to: Review and Release Processing, TDCJ Parole Division, P.O. Box 13401, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711.

**Should I send the letter to each parole panel member?**

It is not necessary to send a copy of the letter to each parole panel member. Letters are placed in the participant's file to be available to any reviewing parole panel member.

**Recommendations**

- This is a professional letter written to an important audience so it's wise to format the letter professionally. Use letterhead and proper letter formatting as shown in the examples. Copy, paste and personalize the letterhead example included here if you would like.
- Type the letter. Making the letter easy to read is the goal if you want your letter to be reviewed.
- Your letter should be short and to the point. There is a very good chance a parole board member will review a one-page typed document which would take one minute to read rather than a five-page handwritten letter which would take 10 minutes to read.
- Be sure to use the participant's name exactly as it appears in their prison records and always include his TDCJ number. The prison system may contain 50 Joe Smith's so it is of the utmost importance to help the board identify who the letter is regarding.
- Be genuine and honest. It's important that you accurately represent your feelings and beliefs about your loved one. Don't exaggerate with flowery language or make statements that are untrue. Inconsistencies between your perspective and reality may actually be a red flag to the Parole Board.
- NEVER request that the board re-try the case of the participant. The board is not charged with determining innocence or guilt. Their goal is to weigh the interests of public safety and the inmate's readiness to be released to supervision.
- Once you have completed your support letter, sign it and make copies. Send the original to the Parole Board, send a copy to your loved one, and keep one for your records.
- Letters that say "He made a mistake and he has learned his lesson" are not nearly as effective as a letter with a few examples of how the participant used to act before versus how he acts now and a conclusion that he will not make the same mistakes in the future. Giving the Parole Board examples and information to work from so they can draw their own conclusions (and agree with your conclusion) is much more effective than requesting them to accept your conclusions in blind faith.
- Remember that a parole vote is about balancing rehabilitation of the participant with the safety and security of the community. Community interests will always win out; therefore, it is imperative to persuade the Board that he is not a threat to the community.

**Addition Resources Regarding Support Letters**

- <http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/faq/faq.html>
- [www.prisontalk.com](http://www.prisontalk.com)
- Internet search engine key words
  - Parole support letter
  - Family parole letter
  - Parole package

## Sample Letter Format and Content Suggestions

{Letterhead}

{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, for 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 have you 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 accountability that will be in your loved one's life. This can include the parole officer, family and PEP. 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 an idea of what the letter could look like.

## Example 1

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# Ms. Jane Doe

11937 Sunshine Drive  
Tyler, TX 77555

Jane\_Doe@gmail.com  
555-555-5555

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May 28, 2009

In Reference To: John Doe (#123456) – Parole Support Letter for His File  
Wynne Unit  
Huntsville, TX 77555

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:

My name is Jane Doe, and I am 60 years old. I have been employed at the Community Bank of Texas for 10 years as a bank teller. My husband and I have been married for 30 years, and we have two children including our oldest son, John Doe (#123456), who is coming up for parole shortly. This letter is intended as a parole support letter to be placed in his file.

Our family has attended visitation at least twice every month for the past five years, traveling about 200 miles round trip. I also correspond via mail with John on a weekly basis, as we have since his incarceration began five years ago.

Although John made some grave mistakes in the past, I believe he is a changed man who will be a productive and law-abiding citizen upon release. Examples of this include:

- John has strong feelings of remorse and responsibility for his crime. His drinking problem was caused by a broken marriage, which led to his grave mistake of drinking and driving. Since he has been incarcerated, he has dealt with the emotions of his divorce in a positive way by reading marriage and relationship books, by speaking with the prison chaplain and through discussions with our family at visitation. I believe he has seen how destructive his behaviors became, and I am convinced he is in a much better place emotionally.
- John graduated high school in 1995 and completed his associate's degree for diesel mechanics in 1997. He worked in the same job for five years prior to his incarceration.
- While incarcerated, John has continued his education by participating in programs such as Changes, Bridges to Life and the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP). These programs have had a profound impact on his perspectives on life, his mindset and his attitude.
- John has obeyed the rules in prison and has received no disciplinary cases during his incarceration.
- John has attended AA meetings during his entire incarceration to try to better understand his addiction issues and triggers. I feel he has made a tremendous commitment to his sobriety.
- John has also stopped swearing in the past 12 months which is a little thing, but I believe it shows his commitment to being a more positive and healthy individual.

- When John was growing up, he was so passionate about cars and determined to make a good life for himself. I believe that fire has been re-ignited in him, and he is committed to taking full advantage of his second chance at a normal life.

I am proud to say that John will be well-supported upon his release from prison. If he receives parole during this voting process, here is the plan we have discussed to help him successfully re-enter society.

- Employment: John has maintained a good relationship with his previous employer, Texas Diesel, and they have promised him employment at \$20/hour when he is ready to start working again. Please see the attached letter from Bob Johnson, owner of Texas Diesel, that describes the location, work duties, wage rate and other details of the employment offer.
  - John never drank alcohol with anyone he used to work with so I do not believe returning to the same employment situation will be detrimental to his sobriety.
- Residence: John plans to live at a transitional home called Open Door Mission (ODM) in Houston which is a great Christian environment where he will be surrounded by other PEP graduates. The rent will be very affordable at \$25/week. Please see the attached acceptance letter from ODM which contains the facility address and phone number. Pictures of the facility are also attached. John's goal is to stay at ODM for six months to save up money and then move to an apartment near his job.
  - John's charge was in Houston, but I do not believe living in the same city will be detrimental to his success upon release. The drinking problem was associated with strong emotions from a tough situation which has passed, and John has not maintained ties with any friends he used to drink heavily with.
- Transportation: Because of John's DUI charges, he will likely have some stipulations on his ability to drive a car. For now, John is planning to utilize the public transportation system in Houston, and he also plans to purchase a bike for additional mobility.
- Addiction Recovery: John is committed to continuing his recovery by attending AA meetings, whether required by parole or not. He plans to attend meetings in the local area to find a group where he feels comfortable, and then attend at least once a week for at least the first year after his release.
- Support system: John will be well-supported by loved ones upon his release, including:
  - My husband and I: We plan to visit John as often as possible, and we also plan to call him everyday once he is able to purchase a cell phone. We hope to be a constant source of encouragement and accountability. We do have financial resources to help as well, but John is a grown man and we plan to let him support himself unless the situation arises where support is urgently needed.
  - PEP case manager: John will be assigned a case manager through PEP, and he will be in continual contact with that person. He will be required to call weekly as well as attend weekly classes. His case manager will be a good source of accountability and moral support through the reintegration process.
  - PEP brothers: John will be living amongst his PEP brothers at ODM, and those men will be his primary friendships upon release. They have created a community of support and accountability which will be great for John.
- Clothing: John has a lot of clothing from before his incarceration that will be available to him. He will also get professional clothing from the closet at the PEP office.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that I believe John is a changed man who is ready for the opportunity of freedom again. His commitment to personal transformation has been evident to our family, and we hope you can see the positive changes he has made through his record of achievements and behavior throughout his incarceration.

Please feel free to contact me at 555-555-5555 or jane\_doe@gmail.com if you have any questions. Thank you for taking the time to review this letter.

Respectfully,

Jane Doe

**Example 2**

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**Ms. Jane Doe**

11937 Sunshine Drive  
Tyler, TX 77555

Jane\_Doe@gmail.com  
555-555-5555

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May 28, 2009

In Reference To: John Doe (#123456) – Parole Support Letter for His File  
Wynne Unit  
Huntsville, TX 77555

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:

My name is Jane Doe, and I am 28 years old. I have been employed at Wal-Mart for nearly two years as a cashier. I am engaged to be married to John Doe (#123456), and we have a two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. John has been incarcerated since before Elizabeth's birth, and he is coming up for parole in the near future. This letter is intended to be a parole support letter to be placed in his file.

As a single-income family, I work extra shifts to support our family which has resulted in less visits to John than I would prefer because of time and financial reasons. Although we only get to see each other at visitation about once every two months, John and I write letters every week, and even with the distance, we are a great support system for each other.

In his late teens and early 20's, John made some big mistakes that have resulted in severe consequences. However, I believe that he has matured a lot over the past couple of years, and the time away from me and our daughter has been a catalyst for change in his attitude, decision-making and goals. Some examples of how he has changed include the following:

- John is committed to never using or selling drugs again. As a recreational user since age 17, John has realized that the temporary highs from using are nothing compared to the happiness that can come from being a responsible man who cares for his family. John's remorse from his mistakes is evident in how guilty he feels about missing out on Elizabeth's birth and first two years of her life.
- And although he enjoyed the fast money that dealing provided, he had to watch as we lost everything after his arrest. He can now see how irresponsible and short-sighted he was. Today he is committed to furthering his education upon release so he can support our family legitimately and responsibly.
- John dropped out of high school at 17 and bounced from job to job during his early 20's. While in prison, he has earned his GED and is learning the welding vocation so he can get a good job upon release. He is truly committed to being a good provider to our family. He also plans to register at the Houston Community College upon release to learn the CAD/CAM trade which is in high demand in the Houston area.
- During his incarceration, John also graduated from the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP).



He truly excelled in this program while learning a lot about himself, business and life skills. PEP has given him even more confidence, drive and motivation to become a success in life.

- Although John received a couple disciplinary cases early in his incarceration, he has not received any cases in the past 1.5 years which is yet another example of how he is a changed man today.
- Although John was only a recreational user of drugs, he is committed to not falling back into the same patterns upon release. He feels that his attendance at NA meetings over the past year has provided a tremendous support and inspiration for him.
- In the past five years of knowing John, I have never seen him so determined, focused and positive. I believe that his motivation to be an honorable and law-abiding husband and father is honest, sincere and real.

John is going to face a lot of hurdles upon his release as an adult who has never held down a real job and as a felon straight out of prison, but I believe the support system he has in place will help him overcome all of those obstacles.

- **Employment:** With his welding experience in prison, John is confident that he will be able to find a job in Houston for at least \$10/hour. Once he gets more free world experience, his earning potential will be even higher.
- **Residence:** John plans to live at a PEP-sponsored transitional home called Open Door Mission (ODM) in Houston. It will be a great environment for him, as he will be living with his PEP brothers who he can count on for support, encouragement and accountability, and the rent is only \$25/week including meals. Please see the attached acceptance letter which contains more information about ODM.
  - After John is able to save up \$2,000, he plans to get an apartment, and then Elizabeth and I will join him in Houston. It will be hard for us to be apart immediately upon his release, but I know he needs time to establish himself before he will be able to care for us.
  - John's charge was in Tyler, and we feel relocating to Houston is a good choice for him so he can remove himself from the bad influences of family and friends in Tyler.
- **Transportation:** John plans to ride the Houston bus system until he is able to afford a car.
- **Addiction Recovery:** John plans to continue attending NA meetings in the free world. He feels that staying active in NA will help keep him grounded in the reality of the harms drugs have caused him.
- **Support system:** John will have a great support network upon release, including:
  - Elizabeth and me: Although we will be living apart for the first six months or so, we plan on talking every day. We are both committed to encouraging each other and also providing accountability to goals we have both set for ourselves. I am not able to provide much financial support, but John is committed to becoming a responsible man who can provide for himself and his family so that should not be an issue.
  - PEP case manager: John will have a case manager at PEP who will be another source of support and accountability. John will be required to make office visits, call in weekly and attend eSchool on Tuesday nights. His case manager will pick him up on the day of his release, help teach him the bus route, take him to his first parole visit, etc. John is excited to have a go-to support person who knows the re-entry process so well.
  - PEP brothers: John has made a lot of life-long friends in the PEP class. They have all committed to supporting each other through the tough transition back to the free world.
- **Clothing:** I have a closet full of clothing which I plan to send to the PEP office so John will have them upon his release. He will also get professional business clothing from PEP.

I hope through your review of John's file, including this letter, you will be able to see the incredible transformation in John that I have been privileged to witness. John is a good man who has made mistakes, but he is now committed to being the man, husband and father that God intended him to be.

Please feel free to contact me at 555-555-5555 or jane\_doe@gmail.com if you have any questions. Thank you for taking the time to review this letter.

Respectfully,

Jane Doe