

Tips for Writing Support Letters for Clemency or Parole

By Jennifer Rose

Useful Links

A good place to find info on how to write a clemency or parole board support letter for incarcerated people, and sample letters/templates are at these websites:

- www.uncommonlaw.org
- www.nationalclemencyprojectinc.com
- www.womeninprison.org

Note: CCWP has a commutation application guide available.

Tips

- The letter can be brief or lengthy, depending on your familiarity or info. It is good to provide more detailed information on your observations of positive character traits, or rehabilitative/educational achievements mitigate against a continued imposition of a disproportionate sentence.
- Demonstrate that there has been personal change in the prisoner which justifies a sentence reduction and early release. You should also state how you may be able to support the prisoner upon release (e.g., housing, funds, transportation, employment, or other specific support).
- It may be between two and four pages, depending on your knowledge of the person.

Suggested Letter Format

Date: Insert date letter is written.

Inside Address: The Honorable _____ (Judge's name and address, or governor's/president's information).

Regarding: Defendant's Name (and prisoner ID number).

Body: Briefly introduce yourself and set forth your relationship to the defendant. The remainder of your letter will hopefully disclose factors mitigating against the imposition of a harsh sentence upon this individual or why they should be released on bond and should not be considered a flight risk or danger to community.

Closing: Respectfully submitted, (your name).

Margin: Please provide for at least a one-inch left-hand margin to allow for binding of the letter into the appendix of the memorandum being composed on the defendant's behalf.

When Letter is Completed: Mail the final product to the prisoner or their attorney. Forward your letter to the prisoner so that it can be forwarded to counsel along with Sentencing Memorandum that is being prepared to be presented to the court with other letters being written for this purpose. If they are sent directly to the judge's chambers, they may have less impact and could cause the judge a substantial inconvenience.