

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 2503**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

*Liz Miranda and Andres X. Vargas*

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act to promote equitable access to parole.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Liz Miranda</i>	<i>5th Suffolk</i>	<i>2/16/2021</i>
<i>Andres X. Vargas</i>	<i>3rd Essex</i>	<i>2/16/2021</i>
<i>Lindsay N. Sabadosa</i>	<i>1st Hampshire</i>	<i>2/17/2021</i>
<i>Mindy Domb</i>	<i>3rd Hampshire</i>	<i>2/20/2021</i>
<i>Tram T. Nguyen</i>	<i>18th Essex</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Kay Khan</i>	<i>11th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Michelle L. Ciccolo</i>	<i>15th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Chynah Tyler</i>	<i>7th Suffolk</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Nika C. Elugardo</i>	<i>15th Suffolk</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Elizabeth A. Malia</i>	<i>11th Suffolk</i>	<i>3/15/2021</i>
<i>Bud L. Williams</i>	<i>11th Hampden</i>	<i>3/18/2021</i>

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 2503**

By Representatives Miranda of Boston and Vargas of Haverhill, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 2503) of Liz Miranda, Andres X. Vargas and others relative to access to parole. Public Safety and Homeland Security.

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court  
(2021-2022)**

An Act to promote equitable access to parole.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1 SECTION 1. Section 4 of chapter 27 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2016  
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking out the first paragraph and inserting in place  
3 thereof the following paragraph:-

4 "There shall be in the department, but not subject to its jurisdiction, a parole board,  
5 consisting of nine members, to be appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of the  
6 council, for terms of five years. The governor may, with the advice and consent of the council,  
7 remove members from the board for cause, upon a written certification of such cause; provided  
8 that such member shall have the right to notice and the opportunity for a public hearing before  
9 the council relative to such removal."

10 SECTION 2. Section 4 of said chapter 27, as so appearing, is hereby amended by  
11 inserting after the second paragraph the following paragraph:-

12 "At all times, at least four members of the parole board shall have at least five years of  
13 experience in fields of psychiatry, psychology, social work, or the treatment of substance use  
14 disorder. One of those four members must be a licensed mental health professional, as defined in  
15 G.L. c. 123, § 1. And at all times one of the nine members of the board shall be someone who is,  
16 or has been, directly impacted by incarceration or parole. If, at any time, the parole board does  
17 not have above designated five members, then, until the board composition complies with this  
18 requirement, every candidate recommended for a parole board position must possess at least one  
19 of the qualifications listed above. This provision applies notwithstanding any other provision of  
20 law.”

21 SECTION 3: Section 133A of chapter 127 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2016  
22 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking out the first paragraph in its entirety and  
23 replacing it with the following paragraph:

24 "Every prisoner who is serving a sentence for life in a correctional institution of the  
25 Commonwealth, except prisoners serving a life sentence for murder in the first degree who had  
26 attained the age of 18 years at the time of the murder and except prisoners serving more than one  
27 life sentence arising out of separate and distinct incidents that occurred at different times, where  
28 the second offense occurred subsequent to the first conviction, shall be eligible for parole at the  
29 expiration of the minimum term fixed by the court under section 24 of chapter 279 . The parole  
30 board shall, for every person who is eligible for parole, conduct a public hearing no later than 90  
31 days before the person’s parole eligibility date. The hearing shall be before a panel of at least six  
32 members of the board for purposes of granting parole. The Board shall issue its record of  
33 decision no later than 30 days before the parole eligibility date. If a board member has a conflict  
34 of interest to the extent that he or she cannot render a fair and impartial decision or that the

35 appearance of a board member would be unduly burdensome because of illness, incapacitation,  
36 or other circumstance, the chair shall appoint another member of the board to the hearing panel.  
37 Whether a member is unavailable for the purposes of this section shall be determined by the  
38 chair. Board members shall appear unless said chair determines them to be unavailable. Under no  
39 circumstances shall a parole hearing proceed pursuant to this section unless at least five members  
40 are present at the public hearing, with the sixth member voting after watching a recording of the  
41 hearing."

42

43 SECTION 4. Section 133A of chapter 127 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is  
44 hereby further amended by striking out the third paragraph and inserting in place thereof the  
45 following paragraph:-

46 "After such hearing the parole board may, by a vote of a majority of the hearing panel,  
47 grant to such prisoner a parole permit to be at liberty upon such terms and conditions as it may  
48 prescribe for the unexpired term of his sentence. If such permit is not granted, the parole board  
49 shall, at least once in each ensuing three year period, consider carefully and thoroughly the  
50 merits of each such case on the question of releasing such prisoner on parole, and may, by a vote  
51 of the majority of the hearing panel, grant such parole permit. By request of the hearing panel,  
52 any case may be referred to the full membership of the board for further consideration."

53

54 SECTION 5: Section 136 of chapter 127 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2016  
55 Official Edition, is hereby amended by adding after the first paragraph the following:-

56 "Any information provided to the board shall also be made available to the prisoner or the  
57 prisoner's representative except for such portion thereof which contains information the board  
58 determines is actually necessary to keep confidential to protect the security of a criminal or civil  
59 investigation, to protect anyone from physical harm or to protect the source of any information;  
60 provided, however, that it was obtained under a promise of confidentiality."

61 SECTION 6. Section 130 of chapter 127 of the General Laws, as amended by St.2018, c.  
62 72, § 6, eff. Jan. 13, 2019, is hereby struck and replaced with the following paragraphs:-

63 All parole release hearings shall be recorded and the recordings shall be available to  
64 parole applicants and their attorneys as requested. All recordings of parole hearings for people  
65 serving life sentences shall be public records. Representation of parole applicants by attorneys or  
66 law students under attorney supervision shall be permitted.

67 Unless the board determines by clear and convincing evidence that, if the prisoner is  
68 released with appropriate conditions and community supervision, the prisoner will not live and  
69 remain at liberty without violating the law, a parole permit shall be granted at a prisoner's first  
70 date of parole eligibility and at any subsequent review hearing.

71 The board shall consider the prisoner's participation in available work opportunities,  
72 educational opportunities and treatment programs and the prisoner's demonstrated good  
73 behavior. The board shall also consider whether risk reduction programs, made available through  
74 collaboration with criminal justice agencies or with the Department of Mental Health,  
75 Department of Developmental Disabilities or Department of Public Health, and other aspects of  
76 the prisoner's parole plan would minimize the probability of the prisoner reoffending once  
77 released. During any periods of state or public health or other emergency that impact the

78 operations of the prison system, the parole board shall consider any public health or public  
79 interest in granting parole, and shall consider the impact of continued incarceration on the  
80 incarcerated person's own health and safety.

81         The record of the board's decision shall contain a summary statement of the evidence  
82 presented at the hearing and shall include specific reasons for the decision that are particular to  
83 that parole applicant, including written certification that each board member voting on the issue  
84 of granting a parole permit has reviewed the entire criminal record of the applicant, as well as the  
85 number of members voting in favor of granting a parole permit and the number of members  
86 voting against granting a parole permit. Minority or dissenting votes shall be accompanied by a  
87 statement of reasons for that vote written by that board member. Any record of decision denying  
88 parole shall specify, in detail and not in conclusory terms, the reasons for the denial, all evidence  
89 relied upon, and the particular tasks that the applicant must complete prior to the next hearing in  
90 order to gain a parole permit. Any minority or dissenting opinions shall be included in the record  
91 of decision. Said record of decision shall become a public record and shall be available to the  
92 public except for such portion thereof which contains information upon which said decision was  
93 made which said information the board determines is actually necessary to keep confidential to  
94 protect the security of a criminal or civil investigation, to protect anyone from physical harm or  
95 to protect the source of any information; provided, however, that it was obtained under a promise  
96 of confidentiality. All such confidential information shall be segregated from the record of  
97 decision and shall not be available to the public. Said confidential information may remain secret  
98 only as long as publication may defeat the lawful purposes of this section for confidentiality  
99 hereunder, but no longer.

100 For any prisoner with a disability, the parole board must consider whether provision of  
101 reasonable accommodations will enable the prisoner to live and remain at liberty without  
102 violating the law. If a prisoner has a disability that may impair the ability of the prisoner to be  
103 successful on parole, the board shall refer the case to the Committee for Public Counsel Services  
104 for the appointment of counsel and ascertainment of psychological or medical examination to  
105 identify and evaluate the nature of the risk posed by the disability and to identify any services,  
106 supports, or programs that might mitigate the risk. The board shall consider the evaluation in  
107 making its decision.

108 Upon issuance of a grant of parole to anyone who needs specialized care due to bodily  
109 infirmity or disease and who is unable to secure a home plan, the parole board shall notify the  
110 Commissioner of the Department of Public Health who shall secure a medically appropriate  
111 placement for such prisoner within 60 days. No individual who has been granted parole shall  
112 remain incarcerated for failure to secure an appropriate home plan.

113 Any and all parole guidelines, policies and practices must be publicly available. The  
114 board shall also make adjustments in its guidelines, policies and practices to prevent systemic  
115 disparate impact based solely on prisoners' race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or  
116 socio-economic characteristics. The board shall produce a public report detailing its assessment  
117 of the guidelines, policies and practices adjustments made to each as a result thereof.

118 A prisoner to whom a parole permit is granted shall be allowed to go upon parole outside  
119 prison walls and inclosure upon such terms and conditions as the parole board shall prescribe,  
120 but shall remain, while thus on parole, subject to the jurisdiction of such board until the  
121 expiration of the term of imprisonment to which he has been sentenced or until the date which

122 has been determined by deductions from the maximum term of his sentence or sentences for  
123 good conduct and any further deductions for compliance credits granted pursuant to section  
124 130C, provided that such combined deductions shall not exceed 35 per cent of the term of  
125 imprisonment to which the prisoner has been sentenced, or until such earlier date as the board  
126 shall determine that it is in the public interest for such prisoner to be granted a certificate of  
127 termination of sentence. Once a person has lived on parole for three years without violating the  
128 law, upon application, the Board shall terminate their parole pursuant to MGL c. 127, sec 130A  
129 unless there is clear and convincing evidence that it is in the public interest for parole to  
130 continue.

131 In every case, such terms and conditions shall include payment of any child support due  
132 under a support order, as defined in section 1A of chapter 119A, including payment toward any  
133 arrearage of support that accrues or has accrued or compliance with any payment plan between  
134 the prisoner and the IV-D agency as set forth in chapter 119A, provided, however, that the board  
135 shall not revise, alter, amend or revoke any term or condition related to payment of child support  
136 unless the parole permit itself is revoked. If the terms and conditions prescribed by the board  
137 include residence in alcohol and drug free housing, the board shall refer and require that the  
138 prisoner to whom the permit is granted reside in alcohol and drug free housing that is certified  
139 under section 18A of chapter 17 in order to satisfy those terms and conditions. In no event shall  
140 conditions prescribed by the board include a ban on association with other persons who have  
141 been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor offense, or other persons under supervision of  
142 probation or parole, unless there is a particularized and individualized reason for such condition.



143           The board shall not issue a warrant for the detention of persons on parole who are  
144 charged with a non-criminal violation of their parole. Such persons shall await their initial and  
145 final parole revocation hearings in the community.

146           The board shall not revoke parole for violation of a condition of parole that does not  
147 result in a new conviction unless it determines on the record at a final parole revocation hearing  
148 that: (1) modification of parole conditions would be inconsistent with the public interest, (2)  
149 appropriate intermediate sanctions have been utilized and have been ineffective and (3)  
150 revocation is consistent with the public interest, public health and public safety. The board shall  
151 not revoke parole for violation of a condition of parole where the violation stems from substance  
152 use disorder relapse or where reasonable accommodation for a disability would enable the  
153 prisoner to live and remain at liberty without violating the law.

154           The board shall keep and aggregate data on grants and denials of parole and rescissions  
155 and revocations of parole. This data shall be released to the public on a quarterly basis. The data  
156 shall include, but not be limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, voluntarily disclosed sexual  
157 orientation, disability, the type of crime, the type of parole hearing including whether a release  
158 hearing was an initial hearing, a review hearing or a review after revocation hearing, the length  
159 of the prisoner's sentence and the amount of time served. For release hearings, the data shall  
160 include the time elapsed between a grant of parole and the date the prisoner is released on parole.

161           Section 7 - Section 158 of chapter 127 of the General Laws as appearing in the 2016  
162 Official Edition, is hereby amended by adding after the word “employment” in the first  
163 paragraph the following:”housing, mental health services, medical care, and treatment for

164 substance use disorders, or any other services necessary for them to live successfully in the  
165 community”