



Adaptation Notice: This document was adapted from materials originally developed by UnCommon Law. While inspired by their framework, this version has been revised and reworded by (De)serving Life to reflect the needs of justice-involved individuals in New Mexico. This adaptation is not affiliated with or endorsed by UnCommon Law. We are deeply grateful for the foundational work of UnCommon Law. If you would like to learn more about their services, access additional resources, or get in contact with their team, please visit: www.uncommonlaw.org

Please note: This guide does not serve as legal advice. Every individual's situation is unique, and the parole process can vary widely. If you have legal questions, we strongly encourage you to consult a qualified parole attorney.

Writing a Letter of Support

This guide is designed to help you write a meaningful letter of support for someone preparing for a parole hearing. A letter like this can show the parole board that the person they are reviewing has real, reliable people in their corner. People who believe in their growth and are willing to support them as they return home.

Whether you're a family member, friend, mentor, employer, or community member, your words can make a difference. If you have any questions after reading this, feel free to reach out to our team.

Your letter will help demonstrate that the person preparing for parole has a strong support system in place. One that can help them navigate the challenges of reentry with stability, accountability, and encouragement. Even if you live far away, your support still matters. The Board takes these letters seriously because they reflect the real-life connections that will be available after release.

Support letters generally fall into one of three types:

- **Practical Support (Parole Plan)**
Offering specific things like housing, employment, transportation, or financial assistance.
- **Emotional & Community Support**
Showing your ongoing commitment to stay involved through friendship, mentorship, church, or mutual aid.
- **Testimonial Support**
Sharing your personal or professional observations of the person's growth, especially if you've known them during their incarceration.

Below, we'll go into more detail about each type of support letter. What it looks like, what to include, and how to make your words count.

I. What Kind of Support Can I Offer?

There are different ways to show your support, and each one helps the board understand how this person is set up for success on the outside. Your letter might include:

Practical Support (Parole Plan)

This kind of letter lays out the practical things you're offering. That might include a place to stay, a job, transportation, financial help, or access to treatment or mentorship.

Examples:

- They'll be living with me at [address], in a private room in my home.
- I'm offering them a job at my landscaping company starting at \$16/hour.
- I'll take them to their parole meetings and work until they get a license.
- I'll bring them to weekly NA meetings and help connect them with therapy.
- I'm able to send \$100/month while they get on their feet.

Be specific. Vague promises like "I'll be there for them" don't carry the same weight as real, detailed commitments.

Emotional & Community Support

Even if you can't provide housing or a job, your encouragement and consistent presence still matters. These letters show that the person has someone who believes in them and is staying connected.

Examples:

- I've known [name] since childhood and will check in with them weekly.
- I'll attend church with them each Sunday and support their return to our faith community.
- I'm inviting them to join our volunteer group to help them reconnect with others.

Testimonial Support

These letters come from people who have seen the parole candidate's growth in a more professional or structured setting. They are especially powerful when written by someone who can speak to the person's progress over time, their character, and their readiness to return to the community. There are two main types of testimonial letters:

1. Inside the Prison Community

These letters come from people who have worked with the parole candidate while they've been incarcerated. That might include:

- Teachers, tutors, or GED instructors
- Counselors or self-help group facilitators
- Work supervisors, chaplains, or volunteers
- Fellow incarcerated people who were mentored or supported by them

- Correctional staff who've seen their behavior and growth

These letters can be especially helpful when they show how the person handles responsibility, builds positive relationships, and learns from past mistakes. If the person had any write-ups or disciplinary issues in the past, your letter might help explain how they've changed since then.

2. People Familiar with the Case

This kind of testimonial comes from individuals who were involved in the original court case. That might include:

- A defense attorney
- A judge or prosecutor
- An investigator or juror

These letters often carry weight because they show the person's growth from a long-term, big-picture perspective. Sometimes, these writers will say they never expected the person to stay in prison this long, or that they now believe the person has done enough time for their role in the crime. These voices may come from the same legal world as the Parole Board, which can make them especially impactful. What would the person you harmed want or need to hear from you, not just in words, but in tone and intention?

II. How to Format Your Letter.

Your letter doesn't need to be long or complicated, but it should be easy to read and properly organized. The way you format your letter can help the Parole Board focus on the most important parts of what you're saying.

Start with the basics at the top of the page:

- Your full name, the date, and your contact information (address, phone number, and email if available)
- A simple title like: Letter of Support for [Full Name]

Then in the body of the letter:

- Open with: Dear Parole Board or To Whom It May Concern
- Say who you are and how you know the person
- Mention how long you've known them or how you've stayed in touch
- Describe what kind of support you're offering (housing, job, emotional, etc.)
- Share why you believe they're ready to return home
- Finish with your name and a signature at the end.

Keeping it clean, organized, and personal will help your letter feel sincere and respectful.

III. The Do's and Don'ts of Writing a Support Letter

This part is about the content. What you say—and how you say it—can really affect how your letter is received. Your goal is to show real support, based on real insight.

What to Include (Do's)

- Focus on what matters most: the person's growth and your commitment to support them.
- Be honest about how you know the person and your relationship
- Talk about how they've changed over time, especially during incarceration
- Share how you've stayed connected, or how you plan to support them moving forward
- Keep it specific and personal—what makes this person ready to come home?

Let the Board see that you believe in them and are actively part of their future. Your letter should feel like something only you could write. Make it genuine.

What to Avoid (Don'ts)

There are a few things that can weaken a support letter or even hurt someone's chances. Try to avoid:

- Saying or implying that the crime wasn't serious, or that they were barely involved
- Calling the crime a "mistake" or minimizing what happened
- Saying they've "always been perfect," especially if that's not true
- Arguing about how much time they've served
- Telling the Board how to do their job

Stay focused on what you know about the person today, not trying to explain the past. Your voice matters most when it's honest and grounded in the present.

IV. When and Where to Send Your Letter

When:

Timing and delivery can make a big difference. Sending your letter early gives the Board time to read it carefully, and shows that your support is steady and intentional.

- Start writing once the person has a hearing date coming up, ideally 6 to 12 months before the hearing
- If you've written a letter before, write a new one or update your previous one
- If time is short, send it anyway. A good letter is helpful at any stage

Send your letter to:

- The person you're writing it for (so they can bring it to the hearing)
- Their attorney, if they have one
- Or mail it directly to: New Mexico Board of Parole
1451 St. Michael's Drive, Suite 1
Santa Fe, NM 87503

We also suggest that you keep a copy for your own records, just in case. If a letter gets misplaced, it's helpful to have a backup.

(De)serving Life's Mission

We believe no one is the worst thing they've ever done. Everyone has the ability to grow, heal, and contribute to their community. We're here to help build the bridges that carry people from serving life to living it. By writing this letter, you're becoming part of that journey.