

SERVING AS AN ADVOCATE IN THE SUPERVISED RELEASE PROCESS

For People With ‘Juvenile Offense Case’ Hearings

Last updated July 2026

Disclaimer. *This document is not legal advice and does not replace individualized legal assistance from a licensed attorney. It is designed as an informational resource to help the supporters of those being reviewed by the Supervised Release Board understand the supervised release process.*

Introduction

This document is an informational resource about serving as an advocate at a ‘Juvenile Offense Case’ (JOC) hearing before the Minnesota Supervised Release Board (Board). This resource is based on observations of supervised release hearings and feedback from people who have participated in or experienced the supervised release process. When reviewing this resource, remember that it is based on observations from past hearings. It is impossible to predict how future hearings will go.

What is an ‘advocate’ at a JOC hearing?

People being reviewed by the Board are entitled to have one ‘advocate’ present at their supervised release hearing. This advocate can be a family member, friend, mentor, attorney, or other supportive person. An advocate will be asked to speak about the person being reviewed during the hearing.

Who is the best person to serve as an advocate for someone being reviewed?

Determining who is best suited to serve as an advocate is something that those being reviewed should determine for themselves. Advocates should

be prepared to answer direct questions from the Board during the hearing. They should be able to talk about how the person being reviewed has grown and changed over time, using clear examples of why they are ready to come home.

While you may be eager to speak as an advocate for someone eligible for supervised release, the person being reviewed must make this decision strategically, based on their particular circumstances and preferences. This person may be a mentor, a sponsor, an attorney, a teacher, a family member, or a friend. Regardless of who is chosen as an advocate, there are still many other forms of support that a person being reviewed will need to prepare for their hearing. For example: you can support someone being reviewed by researching reentry resources, gathering letters of support, and helping them practice answering the kinds of questions that might be asked at the hearing.

What will the hearing process be like?

It is impossible to predict what hearings will look like going forward. The following observations are based on what occurred at juvenile offense case hearings between 2024 and 2026.

- If the victim(s) or survivor(s) have chosen to participate in the hearing, hearings often open with the victim's statement. The Commissioner and the Board may ask the victim questions about their statement.
- The Commissioner and the Board ask the person being reviewed questions. A list of common questions asked by parole boards around the country is included at the end of this guide.
- The Commissioner generally asks the advocate of the person being reviewed a question. The Board may ask the advocate further questions.
 - The question is generally: *Can you talk about what changes you've seen in [the person being reviewed] over time?*
- The Board asks the person being reviewed any final questions, and gives the person being reviewed a chance to make final comments.

- The Board discusses the hearing and determines what decision it will make live. This can be jarring for people being reviewed and their families, as the Board may say things that feel unfair or untrue, and there is not an opportunity to respond. Generally, after discussing the hearing, the Board will decide whether to deny or grant release. If they deny release, they will discuss and vote on the length of the 'continuance,' or the time before the next hearing, as well as their recommendations for the person being reviewed to complete before the next hearing.

Is there anything I should be aware of when I serve as an advocate in the hearing process?

- **Expectations Regarding Interruptions:** The only people allowed to talk during the hearing process are people who have been directly asked a question by the Board.
- **Timing:** Generally, the Department of Corrections. (DOC) schedules multiple hearings on the same day. The DOC will likely give the person being reviewed an estimate of when their hearing will occur, but this can be subject to change. Be prepared for the possibility that the hearing may be earlier or later than you expect or that the hearing may go longer than you anticipate.
- **Preparation:** It can be nerve-racking to speak before the Board. To prepare, advocates can write out bullet points covering what they want to say at the hearing and practice their response before the hearing itself. Remember that the advocate may be asked a few questions by the Board. The questions are generally about the person being reviewed and their growth over time. Your statement should highlight the positive changes you've seen in the person being reviewed, including examples. You can also discuss any relevant support you will provide if the person being reviewed is released.



Will I be able to be with the person being reviewed in person during the hearing?

It is possible to be in person with the person being reviewed during their hearing:

- **People who are currently incarcerated** are reviewed by the Board over a video call, with the person being reviewed in the facility where they are incarcerated, and the Board at the DOC headquarters in St. Paul. Generally, the Board has allowed advocates to be in person with the person being reviewed at the facility where they are incarcerated. If you wish to be **in person** with the person being reviewed, work with their caseworker a few months in advance to arrange your in person visit. You may need to complete a background check, or fill out paperwork beforehand to ensure that you can enter the facility without any issues. If the person being reviewed is at a high custody facility or in solitary confinement, reach out as early as possible to see if an in person visit is possible. If you are encountering issues attending in person, reach out to the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth at info@cfsy.org to seek assistance.
- **People who are on work release** are allowed to attend their hearings in person at the DOC headquarters. If the person being reviewed is on work release and plans to attend in person, you can attend the hearing with them at the Minnesota Department of Corrections, 1450 Energy Park Drive St. Paul, MN 55108, Afton Room (Rm. 135) – ETC Building (West Entrance). If the person being reviewed is on work release but does not plan to attend in person, you should ask about attending via video call.

If being in person is not feasible for you, you can still participate as an advocate **remotely** over a video call or phone call. If you are joining remotely, ensure that:

- ☐ You call in from a quiet space free from distractions
- ☐ You have strong, reliable wifi
- ☐ Your devices are fully charged, and your power cord is available should you need it
- ☐ You have the phone numbers or emails of DOC staff written down to ensure that you can stay in contact if any technical difficulties occur
- ☐ You have a backup form of communication ready in the event that you have technical difficulties (for example, if you are calling in over Zoom, make sure your phone is charged in case you need to call in).



Video Call Etiquette

If you don't frequently use video calls, there is some video call etiquette that you should be aware of:

- ☐ Before the hearing, ask a tech-savvy friend to practice joining a video call with you so you are familiar with the process. Use the same platform that the DOC uses. As of 2026, they use Microsoft Teams, but you can check what platform they use based on the link the DOC sends you
- ☐ On the day of the hearing, join early to ensure that your camera and microphone are working
- ☐ Keep your microphone muted when you're not speaking to avoid noise
- ☐ Ensure that your microphone is unmuted when it's your turn to speak
- ☐ Be aware of what will show up in the Zoom background behind you—choose a space with a clean and tidy background or blur your background
- ☐ Wear professional clothing

I know someone being reviewed by the Board, but I am not their advocate. Can I still participate in the hearing process?

The only people who can participate directly in a hearing (answering questions or speaking during the hearing) are the person being reviewed, their advocate, the survivors or victims in the case, and the Board members. No one else is allowed to directly participate in the hearing process. That said, even if you can't participate directly, there are several ways to participate indirectly.

- **Write a Letter of Support:** People being reviewed are invited by the Board to submit letters of support from their loved ones and support networks. If you know someone preparing for a supervised release hearing, ask if they want a letter of support from you. You can read more information about submitting a letter of support below.



- **Watch the hearing**

- **Livestream:** Anyone can watch supervised release hearings live at <https://www.youtube.com/@MinnesotaDOC/streams>.
- **In person:** In person attendance at hearings can be a powerful way for the Board to see that the person being reviewed has a large and present support network. Anyone can attend a hearing in person at the Minnesota Department of Corrections, 1450 Energy Park Drive St. Paul, MN 55108. Afton Room (Rm. 135) – ETC Building (West Entrance). The Afton Room is generally locked, so when you arrive, you can lightly knock on the door to be let in, or wait for a break between hearings to go inside.
- **Considerations when watching hearings over livestream or in person:** Please keep in mind that while the Board schedules the hearings in advance, the length of hearings can vary. While the Board generally holds hearings in the order they are presented on their agendas (found at <https://mn.gov/doc/about/supervised-release-board/lifer-schedule/>), it is difficult to predict how long each hearing will take. Log on or arrive early to ensure that you do not miss the hearing you want to see.
- **Recordings:** The Board generally maintains recordings of its hearings online for 4-6 months. You can find recordings of the hearings here: <https://www.youtube.com/@MinnesotaDOC/streams> or here: <https://mn.gov/doc/about/supervised-release-board/lifer-schedule/>.

While all supervised release hearings are livestreamed and open to the public, the person being reviewed may appreciate your asking for their permission to watch or participate. Some people may feel comforted and supported by the knowledge that their network is watching their hearing, and sometimes they may feel uncomfortable or nervous. Talk to the person being reviewed to determine the best approach.

I want to write a letter of support for someone who is preparing for a hearing. What should it say?

Letters of support are a wonderful way to show the Board that the person being reviewed for release has a network of support that will help them



when they come home. When writing a letter of support, consider what the Board is looking for when making a release determination. Parole boards across the country are generally looking for evidence of growth and rehabilitation that suggests that the person being reviewed won't offend again, and evidence of support in the community that suggests that the person being reviewed will do well if they come home.

With that in mind, effective letters of support generally focus on how the person being reviewed has grown over time, their positive contributions to their community, their ability to safely transition home, and examples of the support they will receive when they come home. Back up all of your statements with evidence and examples.

According to DOC policy, letters of support must be submitted to the caseworker of the person being reviewed at least three weeks before the date of the hearing. You can give a copy of the letter of support to the person being reviewed, their caseworker, or send it directly to the Hearings and Release Unit at paroleinputpublic.hru.doc@state.mn.us, attn: Rebecca Holmes Larson.

Letters of support **should include:**

- An explanation of how the letter writer is connected to the person being reviewed
- How long the letter writer has been connected with the person being reviewed
- The letter writer's personal knowledge of how the person being reviewed has grown positively since the commission of the crime, and why they are ready for release
 - To the extent possible, letter writers should include clear examples of instances where the person being reviewed has demonstrated positive growth, strong moral character, or community service
- If the letter writer plans to provide support to the person being reviewed as they transition out of prison, the letter writer should detail ways in which they will provide support (housing, emotional or spiritual guidance, employment, mentorship, treatment, financial assistance, offering membership in a program or religious gathering, etc.)
- Letters of support should be typed, dated, and signed, and should be recent, within the last year.

Letters of support **should not include:**

- The letter writer should not focus on the initial crime itself or the letter writer's view of the fairness of the initial sentence. The Board is much more focused on how the person being reviewed has changed over time, and has no control over the initial sentence.

Using Examples in Your Letters of Support

Instead of saying:

"[The person being reviewed] cares about the people around them and goes out of their way to help people in need."

Use real examples to show why you believe the statement is true:

"[The person being reviewed] cares about the people around them, which they have shown by dedicating time and energy to help those in need. **For example**, they volunteer their time as a facilitator in [example program], where they offer mentorship and support to others serving life sentences. Additionally, they participate in [example recovery group] where they regularly offer mental and emotional support to people who are recovering from alcohol addiction. Even outside of programming, they offer significant support to their friends and loved ones by always being available to offer emotional support when someone is struggling."

Instead of saying:

"If [the person being reviewed] is released, I will be there for them."

Be specific about how you will support them:

"If [the person being reviewed] is released, I will support them when they come home. I will offer housing, connection to my community, and emotional and mental support. I have a bedroom in my home that they can use for free until they are able to save money to get their own apartment. My home is near public transportation that will allow them to access employment or education opportunities. Additionally, I have inquired at the church I attend, and they have several support groups that [the person being released] would be welcome to participate in, including: [list of support groups]. I will be available to assist them as they transition and help them when things are difficult."



Who is eligible for a JOC hearing?

People convicted of a crime that occurred before they were age 18 and who were given a sentence of over 15 years for that crime, are or will be eligible for a juvenile offense case hearing. People are eligible for release consideration after serving 15, 20, or 30 years of incarceration, depending on the structure of their sentence. Minn. Stat. § 244.05. This length of time is called the 'minimum term of imprisonment' or the 'Parole Eligibility Date' (PED). Three years before the minimum term of imprisonment is served, people become eligible for an 'initial' supervised release hearing. At this hearing, the Board assesses the status of the person being reviewed and makes programming recommendations relevant to their release review. The Board does not have the authority to grant release at this initial hearing. Minn. Stat. § 244.05.

I know someone who is eligible for supervised release review. How do I know when their hearing will take place?

The person eligible for review should be informed that they are scheduled for a supervised release hearing from the Department of Corrections or their caseworker. Generally, the DOC provides notice of an upcoming hearing at least three months before the hearing date. You should ask the person eligible for review if they have received any information about a supervised release hearing before the Board. You can also encourage them to ask their caseworker about their hearing and its scheduled date.

Additionally, the Supervised Release Board publishes a public 'Review Schedule' (found online at <https://mn.gov/doc/about/supervised-release-board/lifer-schedule/>). The schedule lists upcoming hearings for the next three to four months, and is regularly updated. The schedule also indicates if someone is receiving a juvenile offense case hearing.



SAMPLE PAROLE QUESTIONS

This list includes general themes and a few sample questions regularly asked by parole boards. This list is not exhaustive, and those preparing for review should consider their own unique circumstances and what questions might come up as a result.

Accountability

- **Key Topics:** Impact on the victim; insight into the crime; responsibility to society
- **Sample Questions:**
 - *Who are your victims, and what do you think the impacts on them have been?*
 - *What do you feel you owe as a result of your offense? To the victim(s)? To the community?*
 - *When you look back at your crime through the eyes of an adult, how do you explain what happened?*
 - *How have your actions proven that you won't reoffend?*

Development and Growth

- **Key Topics:** Mental health and treatment; programming; education / employment training; disciplinary records
- **Sample Questions:**
 - *What steps have you taken to improve yourself in prison?*
 - *What skills have you gained to deal with challenges and difficult situations, and how have these skills changed since you were first incarcerated?*
 - *What has been the most impactful thing you learned while incarcerated (i.e. in treatment, programming, education, etc.)?*
 - *Can you explain (a specific disciplinary issue)? What has changed since that last incident?*



Planning for the future

- **Key Topics:** Reentry plan (housing, employment, transportation, finances, education, support network, etc.); step-down plan (plans for programming, education, employment, volunteering, etc., at lower-level custody facilities)
- **Sample questions:**
 - *What would you like to see happen as a result of today's hearing?*
 - *What makes you feel ready to be (released / moved to a lower custody facility)?*
 - *What challenges would you face if you were released? How do you plan to prepare for them?*
 - *What are your goals while you are still incarcerated?*

We hope that this resource was helpful. For more information, or if you would like to share feedback about this resource, please contact us:

Contact

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