



From the President

COVID-19 and Parole Decision Making

The worldwide pandemic has wreaked havoc on health, economics, and lifestyles. The “new normal,” when it finally arrives, will be unlike anything any of us have ever seen or had to acclimate. This scenario has also affected us in a very different way, one not necessarily even considered or contemplated at the beginning of the virus. Parole boards worldwide are being asked by loved ones and media outlets to release offenders before they contract the illness. However, if someone who is no longer incarcerated commits a new serious offense, the same decision-makers who effected the release are immediately blamed for the new crime and its consequences. Is this fair?

One does not have to look very far to see national publications demanding releasing authorities to take action in reducing older populations who were originally ascertained to be at the highest risk of becoming infected. Periodicals such as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, the Kansas City Star, and USA Today have all weighed in on the need for action to thin prison aged populations.

Advocacy groups such as Human Rights Watch, Prison Policy Initiative, and the Marshall Project have added their collective voices to push a worldwide focus. Magazines such as Vox, The New Yorker, and Forbes have also weighed in; the crescendo mounts.

However, if a released inmate is charged with a new crime after his COVID-19 policy release, all hell breaks loose, as the press has a field day in publicizing and

criticizing parole boards in making such an ill-advised, haphazard, panic stricken decision. The New York Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Jakarta Post, and the aforementioned New York Times have highlighted issues that have arisen since correctional institutions began thinning numbers in March 2020. Parole boards, to put it succinctly, are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

There are no easy answers to this dilemma. Jurisdictions need to look at non-violent, older offenders with no history of sex crimes. That is an obvious starting point. The real problem lies with current legislation that I have studied from all over the world. No medical parole or compassionate release statute deals with a medical situation that one does not already have. Just because an inmate is at a higher risk for catching a serious, sometimes fatal illness, is that basis enough for early release? Releasing authorities do not have laws or regulations that govern that situation and that is quite understandable. These laws were all written after the last pandemic in 1918. The cold, hard reality is that when a release goes bad there is no law or regulations a public relations or media person working for Public Safety can point to that gives a clear, concise rationale for that particular release. The citizens will feel that they have been put at undue risk. Once again, our profession is between a rock and a hard place. Welcome to our world.

David Blumberg
APAI President

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TO-DO IN 2020

- RENEW APAI MEMBERSHIP
- SERVE ON APAI COMMITTEE
- URGE FELLOWS TO JOIN APAI
- MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND THE 2021 ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE IN ARLINGTON MARCH 14 – MARCH 17, 2020

MEMBERSHIP FEES*

INDIVIDUAL	\$65
ORGANIZATIONAL	
(UP TO 8 MEMBERS)	\$375
(9 TO 13 MEMBERS)	\$475
(14 TO 20 MEMBERS)	\$575
ALUMNI	\$40
ASSOCIATE	\$40
STUDENT	\$15

*Fees are on a per year basis.

Member Spotlight

Francis Abbott, Louisiana Board of Pardons & Committee on Parole

by: Ashley Koonce, Executive Director, APAI



APAI would like to announce Francis Abbott, Executive Director of the Louisiana Board of Pardons & Committee on Parole, as the new Chair of the Public Relations and Communications Committee.

Francis Abbott currently serves as the Executive Director for the Louisiana Board of Pardons & Committee on Parole (LBPCP). He has been an Association Member since late 2018. Francis has been a spokesperson for the work of corrections. As a member of the National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA) Offender Workforce Development Specialist (OWDS) Instructor Team he was tasked with promoting the need for career development within correctional industry programs around the country. Later his duties at Louisiana State Penitentiary would often put him in the place of a spokesperson for the prison, overseeing numerous media projects including documentaries and in-depth newspaper and magazine articles around the world. As one of the prison officials with an in-depth knowledge of the infamous prison's history, Francis worked closely with the Louisiana State Penitentiary Museum on various projects including the opening of the Big House Café and playing an integral part in the award winning American Queen Shore Excursion Tour. In his current role at LBPCP he serves as the designated spokesperson for the Board, providing testimony to the Louisiana Legislature, responding to all media requests and overseeing their recently formed victim outreach program.

While he has only served in his current position a short time, he has begun work on incorporating more evidence-based practices into the Board's decision making process and increasing the programming

bundles offered pre- and post-incarceration to formerly incarcerated individuals. Additionally, he was responsible for the creation of the Louisiana Victim Outreach Program and is on the planning committee for the Rural Criminal Justice Summit at the Dedman School of Law on the campus of Southern Methodist University in Houston, Texas. The culture he hopes to bring to this position is a culmination of his corrections work experience starting with Prison Enterprises (PE), the correctional industries (CI) arm of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections (LDPSC). There he worked with men and women to provide job skills training in various correctional facilities. In 2009, he was selected to participate in the National Institute of Corrections' OWDS Training Program as a member of the NCIA CI Team. As an OWDS, Abbott was responsible for conducting trainings with Probation & Parole, Corrections staff and community stakeholders to address the issues of returning citizens gaining meaningful employment around the state of Louisiana and later, nationally through a collaboration between the NIC and NCIA to promote professional development in CI. In 2013, he left PE to work at one of the most notorious prisons in the United States, Louisiana State Penitentiary, better known as Angola. There he managed an innovative program, the Corrections Reentry Court Workforce Program. This multifaceted program addresses the educational, vocational, social, and moral needs of its participants through mentoring provided by offenders with long term sentences and assists participants by connecting them with resources in the communities to which they will return. His most notable contributions to this program and Angola are the Reentry Court Collaborative Program that provides returning citizen with pro-bono assistance for unresolved civil and legal issues and the Compassion Cultivation Training Program which is designed to develop the qualities of compassion, empathy, and kindness for oneself and for others. In addition to his professional life, Francis has served as the Treasurer of the Wilkinson County Christian Academy School Board since 2013.

In the role of Chair of the Public Relations / Communications Committee he plans to keep members engaged by sharing content from around the world that is relevant to the work we do as paroling authorities. He hopes to increase our following across our three social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) by 20% within his first year of service. He is also looking to grow our relationships with other professional organization with the hope of promoting collaboration on social media content.

Victims for Justice

An Interview with a Victims for Justice Executive Director

by: Edie Grunwald, Chair, Alaska Parole Board

1. Tell me about your position, agency and purpose.

I have the honor of being the Executive Director of Victims For Justice (VFJ). At VFJ our mission is to “Care for victims of violent crime” in Alaska. This includes victims of assault, arson, robbery, kidnapping, DUI’s, homicide and other person-on-person acts of violence. At VFJ we have advocates who walk alongside victims throughout the criminal justice process. This includes everything from emotional support to financial aid and systems navigation assistance. We approach things from a victim-centered perspective and work to ensure that as individuals/families progress through the various law enforcement and legal systems they understand their rights, feel prepared and respected. Advocates work with victims and survivors based on their individual needs and what can be done to meet those needs. We try and stay with victims and survivors for the long-term to ensure the least amount of interruptions and transfers.

2. Give me something important you’d like others to know about victims.

If you have been the victim of a violent crime, chances are your life has just been forever altered. This is not something you plan for and not something within your control. All of a sudden, you are thrown into a world of systems and processes that are not designed to care for you or your perspective. Whether that is law enforcement and their focus on apprehending the offender, or the legal processes that extends proceedings out years down the road. For years, you are locked into systems that make it difficult to move forward. As a victim, you are navigating your way through this all while also dealing with your own trauma. Please have compassion. Please understand that this is an overwhelming, convoluted system.

3. Do you partner with other agencies, and if so, who and what is your purpose?

Yes, Victims For Justice strongly believes in partnerships. There is extreme strength in having specializations and allowing each professional to focus on their area of expertise creates a better safety net for us all. Most recently, we are proud to announce that we have partnered with our State District Attorney’s Office and Anchorage Police Department to “embed” advocates. This allows lawyers to focus on legal matters, police to focus on building a case, and advocates to focus on the needs of the victim. Studies show that when victim advocates are involved in each of these stages police and attorneys receive greater cooperation from victims and witnesses. It is vital that we include professionals who are trained in working with people coping with trauma. The value of having

someone clearing a path so that victims can more easily find their way cannot be stated enough. We also partner with agencies like the Office of Victims’ Rights and other victim service providers throughout the state that specialize in domestic violence and sexual assault.

4. Do you have any involvement with legislation for victims?

Victims For Justice was founded on fighting for the rights of victims in the judicial process. Our founders were instrumental in changing the legislative definition of “victim” to include family members of homicide victims. They also fought to gain rights and access to information in juvenile cases similar to what is allowed in adult cases.

VFJ was active in providing public testimony regarding concerns around SB91. Today, we are participating in a few of Alaska’s Criminal Justice Commission Workgroups, specifically looking at policies that enhance public safety, impact victims and affect rates of recidivism in our state. These workgroups will put forth recommendations for the Commission to consider and send to the Legislature.

We also strongly encourage those who work with us to be a voice, share their story and advocate directly for their needs. This can be the most powerful catalyst for change.

5. What role do you play in the parole process/notifications victims get?

VFJ tracks cases related to our clients as they go through the criminal justice process. We encourage anyone we work with to sign up with VINELink and we emphasize the importance of keeping their information accurate and updated with the DOC so they can be reached at the time of parole. We provide education to all our clients on the sentencing structure and what to expect. Understanding things like the two-thirds rule can be complex. We assist with victim impact statements and in rare instances, we have even delivered the statement on behalf of the victims at their request. We can also serve as a liaison between the criminal justice unit and victims when needed.

6. What else would you like to say?

Our goal moving forward is to continue to try to build-in victim-centered responses in each stage in the process. We hope by doing this, we can alleviate some of the burden and increase access to services for victims and survivors of violence in Alaska.

2020 APAI Awards

APAI congratulates and recognizes the following for their service in the field of parole.

by: Ashley Koonce, Executive Director, APAI

The Annual Awards are undoubtedly many of our members' favorite parts of the Annual Conference. There is just nothing quite like watching our incredible members get to honor each other with our annual awards, and of course, it is even more exciting when it is such a surprise to the recipient!

This year, the award nominations were incredible and the Executive Committee and the Awards Committee both agreed that we just could not let this year pass without honoring those who were chosen, prior to the conference being canceled. Over the next two newsletters, we are excited to share with our members the winners of this year's honors! We want to once again congratulate ALL of our nominees and winners!

To read more about all of our awards, you can visit the APAI homepage! We encourage you to begin thinking about the 2021 awards now!

2020 Ben Baer Award Recipient

Lelia VanHoose

This award recognizes and rewards an individual who has demonstrated significant service in the field of parole or community corrections.

The nomination received for Lee was so incredible, that we felt it should be shared with all. Lee has been an incredible member for the association. She always gives input when asked, she helps when needed. She is a mentor and a friend to many. Her nomination was also accompanied by multiple letters in support of her nomination. The association was honored to present Ms. VanHoose with the 2020 Ben Baer Award.

An excerpt from the nomination: Lelia VanHoose, or Lee as she is known by all, has demonstrated service in both her years with Kentucky Department of Corrections Division of Probation and Parole, and more recently in her service on the Kentucky Parole Board, where she currently serves as

Chair. Not only has she brought honor to her profession, she also worked to move both community corrections and parole forward by working to incorporate progressive change and development.

As an active member of APAI, and having both worked with and for Lee VanHoose, I believe she is an excellent candidate for this honor. Her cultural competence and superior work ethic quickly lead to career advancements. Regardless of the position held, Lee has always shown ongoing initiative, demonstrating innovation with credible and lasting results. Lee has always shown leadership and dedication. Earned the respect and the trust of her peers and became a role model in her field while working long hours and maintaining impossible workload.

Lee is one of those individuals who makes a difference. She has been a key individual who stands out from the rest in Kentucky Corrections by achieving excellence and not settling for anything short of excellence. Lee's sole agenda for Kentucky: Creating safer communities and more successful offenders. Lee's personal mantra: If you are not moving forward, you are falling behind!



Pictured: Lee VanHoose, Chair (Left) and Angela Tolley, Director (Right) Kentucky Parole Board

2020 Vincent O'Leary Award

David Blumberg

This award is to recognize and reward an individual who has made significant contributions to APAI and has demonstrated vision, leadership and commitment to the field of parole.

This award was the most difficult secret to keep! David has served our association in a multitude of roles throughout his tenure, with his most current being our President. David is also such an incredible friend and mentor to so many, both in and out of the field. He has been such an integral part of growing

this organization. We are so thankful for his commitment to the association and more importantly to the field of parole.

An excerpt from the nomination: David has served the Maryland Parole Commission over 15 years and has served at the pleasure of three different governors. In March of 2018, David is quoted as stating, "About 97 percent of inmates will eventually be released, and prisons should not be about "warehousing" people. If you're not giving them any tools to succeed, how are you expecting them to be better when they get out? There has to be a punishment, but we have to give them opportunities." David's statements are indicative of his belief that people are redeemable and parole can be used as a mechanism to give people another chance.

David has been a long-standing member of APAI. During that time, he's served as Treasurer, Vice President and President, as well as on the Professional Development and Membership committees. He's guided numerous Executive Committee members, including Regional Vice Presidents, in fulfilling their duties. David has been instrumental in implementing various training opportunities offered by or in partnership with APAI. David collaborated with National Institute of Correction and the National Parole Resource Center to offer training opportunities for Chairpersons, Executive Directors, and Parole Board Members in conjunction with the APAI ATC, which further expanded conference attendance.

David was a key member of developing the Mentorship Program and volunteered as a mentor. In addition, David has been a long standing member of the Professional Development Committee where he offers guidance and support in selecting the training topics so as to meet the needs of our entire membership and he's developed the Chairs meeting agenda for multiple trainings. David's vision for this organization demonstrates consideration for all releasing authorities, regardless of their structure, and his passion for parole is evident in his unwavering leadership of the Maryland Parole Commission and the Association of Paroling Authorities International.



Pictured: David Blumberg, Chair, Maryland Parole Commission

2020 Renee Collette International Excellence Award

Jennifer Oades

This award, which is given in the name of Renee Collette, is to recognize and reward an international individual or an organization, which has contributed significantly to the advancement of international criminal justice.

This honor was quite special, as this was the first annual presentation of this newly established award. The nomination that was received for Ms. Oades was compelling, articulated her commitment to international practices, and illustrated her zeal for creating change within the field.



Pictured: Jennifer Oades, Chairperson, Parole Board of Canada

An excerpt from the nomination: Renée Collette was a pioneer, a visionary who always reminded us to never lose sight of the individuals we work with and the communities we serve. Her career was dedicated to the pursuit of a safe, fair, humane, and effective criminal justice system for offenders, victims and the community and she was a champion of international engagement and dialogue. It can be said that Jennifer Oades' has demonstrated similar values and beliefs her entire career and continues to do so to this day.

Jennifer is a practicing professional who excels at the international level through her participation in a number of organizations for many years and she has made significant contributions to the advancement of international criminal justice at the international level as described below. Ms. Oades has contributed significantly to the advancement of the international community in criminal justice for over 20 years by working with and in organizations whose mandate is to share information and knowledge and to move the correctional agenda forward, more precisely, to move the community correctional agenda forward.

She was the first Executive Director of the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) where she provided leadership in its formal establishment and led the organization of the ICPA's first five international conferences. Throughout her career, Jennifer has held steadfast to her values – a commitment to progressive, effective and humane corrections and conditional release. She continues to champion progressive corrections for women through co-chairing an ICPA Task Force on Women and Community Corrections and is currently exploring gendered parole hearings within the Parole Board of Canada.

She recently presented to the Council of Europe and will be presenting at an official workshop of the 2020 UN Crime Congress in Japan. She is also playing a leading role in co-hosting the Fifth World Congress on Probation and Parole, which will be held in Canada in September 2021.

JULY 2020

2020 CARE Award

Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board

The CARE (Communication Award Recognizing Excellence in Education and Collaboration) Award encourages the use of best practices in the area of public and stakeholder education by yearly bestowing an award to recognize excellence in this area. The Public Relations/Communications Committee shall make the award selection.

The nomination received for the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board clearly articulated the exchange of critical information. The process by which Oklahoma was able to perform such a feat was the result of years of public education and involvement. From the passing of the legislation to the implementation of the reentry pieces, this accelerated single-stage commutation efforts should certainly be recognized.

An excerpt from the nomination: On November 1, 2019, in a highly publicized public meeting, the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board demonstrated for the criminal justice community a new application in criminal justice reform: mass commutations. On the first day HB 1269 went into effect, the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board held a special meeting to consider an accelerated single-stage commutation docket for 814 offenders whose crimes, if sentenced today, would be misdemeanors. This accelerated single-stage approach was authorized under HB 1269 as the method to fulfill the Legislature's desire to grant selective relief to inmates where warranted. The Legislature rejected granting ubiquitous retroactive relief to all eligible offenders because of political and public safety concerns. Similarly, the Legislature rejected using the courts to resolve these cases as an administratively ill-advised approach. Instead, the Legislature settled on a compromise approach that tasked the Pardon and Parole Board to find a process solution that protected public safety while selectively recommending commutation relief to inmates where appropriate.

In September 2019, the Pardon and Parole Board publicly announced its intention to hold this commutation docket and the logic it would be using to recommend for or against commutation. This proac-

tive approach allowed the citizens of Oklahoma to have a say in the process and put criminal justice reform in the public spotlight. Of the 814 inmates on the accelerated single-stage commutation docket, 527 inmates received a favorable recommendation from the Board and were granted commutation by the Governor. Then, on November 4, 2019, 462 inmates were released from Oklahoma prisons in the largest single day commutation in our nation's history. Standing outside of the gates of one of our prisons, Governor Kevin Stitt greeted 55 inmates as they left prison to reenter society in a media event that garnered national and international attention. The actions of the Pardon and Parole Board have provided a viable roadmap and case study that other states can consider as America addresses its mass incarceration problem.

Pictured: Steven Bickley, Executive Director,



2020 President's Award

Christine Burke

This award is given to an individual or organization that has made at least a single significant contribution either to the field of parole or to the Association.

This award is a special award, given from the President to honor a person or organization's contribution. Association President David Blumberg has spoken so highly of Christine's over the past few years. Christine has served in numerous roles in the state of Maryland, including with the Office of the Public Defender. Her position as the Executive Director of the Maryland Parole Commission began in October of 2017, where David quickly realized what an asset she was, not only to the department, but to the state of Maryland and the field of parole.

Christine possesses an unmatched work ethic, and her extensive knowledge of policies, practices, and parole proved to be invaluable for the Parole Commission. David knew it would be fleeting, and he was correct. Christine Burke was recently appointed by the judiciary to the bench as Public Utility Law Judge with the Maryland Public Service Utilities Commission. David was incredibly sad to see her leave, but so proud of her and for her to be achieving such an accomplishment. There is no doubt that she will succeed in this endeavor.



Pictured: Christine Burke, Executive Director,
Maryland Parole Commission

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2021 ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE



ARLINGTON, TX | MARCH 14-17, 2021

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