

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2025 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2865

By Delegates Hornby, Maynor, Funkhouser, Street, J.

Cannon, Akers, Holstein, and Chiarelli

[Introduced February 24, 2025; referred to the

Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §61-2-3, §61-11-8, and §62-12-13 of the Code of West Virginia,
2 1931, as amended, relating to parole eligibility; modifying eligibility for the crimes of murder
3 in the second degree; modifying the parole eligibility for inmates serving life sentences and
4 those who have been convicted of first degree murder; and modifying eligibility for
5 attempted crimes of murder in the first and second degree.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

CHAPTER 61. CRIMES AND THEIR PUNISHMENT.

ARTICLE 2. CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON.

§61-2-3. Penalty for murder of second degree.

1 Murder of the second degree shall be punished by a definite term of imprisonment in the
2 penitentiary which is not less than ~~ten~~ 20 nor more than 40 years. A person imprisoned pursuant to
3 the provisions of this section is not eligible for parole prior to having served a minimum of ~~ten~~ 20
4 years of his or her sentence or the minimum period required by the provisions of §62-12-13 of this
5 code, whichever is greater.

ARTICLE 11. GENERAL PROVISIONS CONCERNING CRIMES.

§61-11-8. Attempts; classification and penalties therefor.

1 Every person who attempts to commit an offense, but fails to commit or is prevented from
2 committing it, shall, where it is not otherwise provided, be punished as follows:

3 (1) If the offense attempted be punishable with life imprisonment, the person making such
4 attempt shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary not
5 less than three nor more than 15 years.

6 (2) If the offense attempted be punishable by imprisonment in the penitentiary for a term
7 less than life, such person shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall, in the discretion of
8 the court, either be imprisoned in the penitentiary for not less than one nor more than three years,
9 or be confined in jail not less than six nor more than 12 months, and fined not exceeding \$500.

(3) If the offense attempted be punishable by confinement in jail, such person shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be confined in jail not more than six months, or fined not exceeding \$100.

(4) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection, If the offense attempted is murder of the first degree, the person making such attempt shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary not less than 10 nor more than 40 years.

(5) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (2) of this subsection, If the offense attempted is murder of the second degree, the person making such attempt shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall be imprisoned in the penitentiary not less than five nor more than 20 years.

CHAPTER 62. CRIMINAL PROCEDURE.

ARTICLE 12. PROBATION AND PAROLE.

§62-12-13. Powers and duties of board; eligibility for parole; procedure for granting parole.

(a) The Parole Board, whenever it is of the opinion that the best interests of the state and of the inmate will be served, and subject to the limitations provided in this section, shall release any inmate on parole for terms and upon conditions provided by this article.

(b) Any inmate of a state correctional institution is eligible for parole if he or she:

(1) (A) Has served the minimum term of his or her indeterminate sentence or has served one fourth of his or her definite term sentence, as the case may be; or

(B) He or she has applied for and been accepted by the Commissioner of Corrections and Rehabilitation into an accelerated parole program. To be eligible to participate in an accelerated parole program, the commissioner must determine that the inmate:

(i) Does not have a prior criminal conviction for a felony crime of violence against the person, a felony offense involving the use of a firearm, or a felony offense where the victim was a

12 minor child;

13 (ii) Is not serving a sentence for a crime of violence against the person, or more than one
14 felony for a controlled substance offense for which the inmate is serving a consecutive sentence, a
15 felony offense involving the use of a firearm, or a felony offense where the victim was a minor child;
16 and

17 (iii) Has successfully completed a rehabilitation treatment program created with the
18 assistance of a standardized risk and needs assessment.

19 (C) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, any inmate who committed,
20 or attempted to commit, a felony with the use, presentment, or brandishing of a firearm is not
21 eligible for parole prior to serving a minimum of three years of his or her sentence or the maximum
22 sentence imposed by the court, whichever is less: *Provided*, That any inmate who committed, or
23 attempted to commit, any violation of §61-2-12 of this code, with the use, presentment, or
24 brandishing of a firearm, is not eligible for parole prior to serving a minimum of five years of his or
25 her sentence or one third of his or her definite term sentence, whichever is greater. Nothing in this
26 paragraph applies to an accessory before the fact or a principal in the second degree who has
27 been convicted as if he or she were a principal in the first degree if, in the commission of or in the
28 attempted commission of the felony, only the principal in the first degree used, presented, or
29 brandished a firearm. An inmate is not ineligible for parole under the provisions of this paragraph
30 because of the commission or attempted commission of a felony with the use, presentment, or
31 brandishing of a firearm unless that fact is clearly stated and included in the indictment or
32 presentment by which the person was charged and was either: (i) Found guilty by the court at the
33 time of trial upon a plea of guilty or nolo contendere; (ii) found guilty by the jury upon submitting to
34 the jury a special interrogatory for such purpose if the matter was tried before a jury; or (iii) found
35 guilty by the court if the matter was tried by the court without a jury.

36 (D) The amendments to this subsection adopted in the year 1981:

37 (i) Apply to all applicable offenses occurring on or after August 1 of that year;

(ii) Apply with respect to the contents of any indictment or presentment returned on or after August 1 of that year irrespective of when the offense occurred;

(iii) Apply with respect to the submission of a special interrogatory to the jury and the finding to be made thereon in any case submitted to the jury on or after August 1 of that year or to the requisite findings of the court upon a plea of guilty or in any case tried without a jury: *Provided*, That the state gives notice in writing of its intent to seek such finding by the jury or court, as the case may be. The notice shall state with particularity the grounds upon which the finding will be sought as fully as the grounds are otherwise required to be stated in an indictment, unless the grounds upon which the finding will be sought are alleged in the indictment or presentment upon which the matter is being tried;

(iv) Does not apply with respect to cases not affected by the amendments and in those cases the prior provisions of this section apply and are construed without reference to the amendments; and

(v) Insofar as the amendments relate to mandatory sentences restricting the eligibility for parole, all matters requiring a mandatory sentence shall be proved beyond a reasonable doubt in all cases tried by the jury or the court.

(E) As used in this section, "felony crime of violence against the person" means felony offenses set forth in §61-2-1 *et seq.*, §61-3E-1 *et seq.*, §61-8B-1 *et seq.*, or §61-8D-1 *et seq.* of this code.

(F) As used in this section, "felony offense where the victim was a minor child" means any felony crime of violence against the person and any felony violation set forth in §61-8-1 *et seq.*, §61-8A-1 *et seq.*, §61-8C-1 *et seq.*, or §61-8D-1 *et seq.* of this code.

(G) For the purpose of this section, the term "firearm" means any instrument which will, or is designed to, or may readily be converted to, expel a projectile by the action of an explosive, gunpowder, or any other similar means;

(2) Is not in punitive segregation or administrative segregation as a result of disciplinary

64 action;

65 (3) Has prepared and submitted to the Parole Board a written parole release plan setting
66 forth proposed plans for his or her place of residence, employment and, if appropriate, his or her
67 plans regarding education and post-release counseling and treatment which has been approved
68 by the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation: *Provided*, That an inmate's application for parole
69 may be considered by the board without the prior submission of a home plan, but the inmate shall
70 have a home plan approved by the division prior to his or her release on parole. The
71 Commissioner of the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or his or her designee, shall
72 review and investigate the plan and provide findings to the board as to the suitability of the plan:
73 *Provided, however*, That in cases in which there is a mandatory 30-day notification period required
74 prior to the release of the inmate, pursuant to §62-12-23 of this code, the board may conduct an
75 initial interview and deny parole without requiring the development of a plan. In the event the board
76 believes parole should be granted, it may defer a final decision pending completion of an
77 investigation and receipt of the commissioner's findings. Upon receipt of the plan, together with the
78 investigation and findings, the board, through a panel, shall make a final decision regarding the
79 granting or denial of parole;

80 (4) Has satisfied the board that if released on parole he or she will not constitute a danger
81 to the community; and

82 (5) Has successfully completed any individually required rehabilitative and educational
83 programs, as determined by the division, while incarcerated: *Provided*, That, effective September
84 1, 2021, any inmate who satisfies all other parole eligibility requirements but is unable, through no
85 fault of the inmate, to complete his or her required rehabilitative and educational programs while
86 incarcerated, which are eligible to be taken while on parole, may be granted parole with the
87 completion of such specified programs outside of the correctional institutions being a special
88 condition of that person's parole term: *Provided, however*, That the Parole Board may consider
89 whether completion of the inmate's outstanding amount of such programming would interfere with

his or her successful reintegration into society.

(c) Except in the case of an inmate serving a life sentence, a person who has been previously twice convicted of a felony may not be released on parole until he or she has served the minimum term provided by law for the crime for which he or she was convicted. An inmate sentenced for life may not be paroled until he or she has served 10 years, and an inmate sentenced for life who has been previously twice convicted of a felony may not be paroled until he or she has served 15 years: *Provided*, That an inmate convicted of first degree murder for an offense committed on or after ~~June 10, 1994~~ July 1, 2025, is not eligible for parole until he or she has served ~~15~~ 25 years.

(d) In the case of an inmate sentenced to a state correctional facility regardless of the inmate's place of detention or incarceration, the Parole Board, as soon as that inmate becomes eligible, shall consider the advisability of his or her release on parole.

(e) If, upon consideration, parole is denied, the board shall promptly notify the inmate of the denial. The board shall, at the time of denial, notify the inmate of the month and year he or she may apply for reconsideration and review. The board shall at least once a year reconsider and review the case of every inmate who was denied parole and who is still eligible: *Provided*, That the board may reconsider and review parole eligibility any time within three years following the denial of parole of an inmate serving a life sentence with the possibility of parole.

(f) Any inmate in the custody of the commissioner for service of a sentence who reaches parole eligibility is entitled to a timely parole hearing without regard to the location in which he or she is housed.

(g) The board shall, with the approval of the Governor, adopt rules governing the procedure in the granting of parole. No provision of this article and none of the rules adopted under this article are intended or may be construed to contravene, limit, or otherwise interfere with or affect the authority of the Governor to grant pardons and reprieves, commute sentences, remit fines, or otherwise exercise his or her constitutional powers of executive clemency.

(h) (1) The Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation shall promulgate policies and procedures for developing a rehabilitation treatment plan created with the assistance of a standardized risk and needs assessment. The policies and procedures shall provide for, at a minimum, screening and selecting inmates for rehabilitation treatment and development, using standardized risk and needs assessment and substance abuse assessment tools, and prioritizing the use of residential substance abuse treatment resources based on the results of the standardized risk and needs assessment and a substance abuse assessment. The results of all standardized risk and needs assessments and substance abuse assessments are confidential.

(2) An inmate shall not be paroled under paragraph (B), subdivision (1), subsection (b) of this section solely due to having successfully completed a rehabilitation treatment plan, but completion of all the requirements of a rehabilitation treatment plan along with compliance with the requirements of subsection (b) of this section creates a rebuttable presumption that parole is appropriate. The presumption created by this subdivision may be rebutted by a Parole Board finding that, according to the standardized risk and needs assessment, at the time parole release is sought the inmate still constitutes a reasonable risk to the safety or property of other persons if released. Nothing in subsection (b) of this section or in this subsection may be construed to create a right to parole.

(i) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, the Parole Board may grant or deny parole to an inmate against whom a detainer is lodged by a jurisdiction other than West Virginia for service of a sentence of incarceration, upon a written request for parole from the inmate. A denial of parole under this subsection precludes consideration for parole for a period of one year or until the provisions of subsection (b) of this section are applicable.

(j) If an inmate is otherwise eligible for parole pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, and has completed the rehabilitation treatment program required under subdivision (1), subsection (h) of this section, the Parole Board may not require the inmate to participate in an additional program, but may determine that the inmate must complete an assigned task or tasks prior to actual release

on parole. The board may grant parole contingently, effective upon successful completion of the assigned task or tasks, without the need for a further hearing.

(k) (1) The Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation shall supervise all probationers and parolees whose supervision may have been undertaken by this state by reason of any interstate compact entered into pursuant to the Uniform Act for Out-of-State Parolee Supervision.

(2) The Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation shall provide supervision, treatment/recovery, and support services for all persons released to mandatory supervision under §15A-4-17 of this code.

(l) (1) When considering an inmate of a state correctional facility for release on parole, the Parole Board panel considering the parole shall have before it an authentic copy of, or report on, the inmate's current criminal record as provided through the West Virginia State Police, the United States Department of Justice, or any other reliable criminal information sources and written reports of the superintendent of the state correctional institution to which the inmate is sentenced:

(A) On the inmate's conduct record while in custody, including a detailed statement showing any and all infractions of disciplinary rules by the inmate and the nature and extent of discipline administered for the infractions;

(B) On the inmate's industrial record while in custody which shall include: The nature of his or her work, occupation or education, the average number of hours per day he or she has been employed or in class while in custody and a recommendation as to the nature and kinds of employment which he or she is best fitted to perform and in which the inmate is most likely to succeed when he or she leaves the state correctional institution; and

(C) On any physical, mental, psychological, or psychiatric examinations of the inmate.

(2) The Parole Board panel considering the parole may waive the requirement of any report when not available or not applicable as to any inmate considered for parole but, in every case, shall enter in its record its reason for the waiver: *Provided*, That in the case of an inmate who is incarcerated because the inmate has been found guilty of, or has pleaded guilty to, a felony

under the provisions of §61-8-12 of this code or under the provisions of §61-8B-1 *et seq.* or §61-8C-1 *et seq.* of this code, the Parole Board panel may not waive the report required by this subsection. The report shall include a study and diagnosis of the inmate, including an on-going treatment plan requiring active participation in sexual abuse counseling at an approved mental health facility or through some other approved program: *Provided, however,* That nothing disclosed by the inmate during the study or diagnosis may be made available to any law-enforcement agency, or other party without that inmate's consent, or admissible in any court of this state, unless the information disclosed indicates the intention or plans of the parolee to do harm to any person, animal, institution, or to property. Progress reports of outpatient treatment are to be made at least every six months to the parole officer supervising the parolee. In addition, in such cases, the Parole Board shall inform the prosecuting attorney of the county in which the person was convicted of the parole hearing and shall request that the prosecuting attorney inform the Parole Board of the circumstances surrounding a conviction or plea of guilty, plea bargaining, and other background information that might be useful in its deliberations.

(m) Before releasing any inmate on parole, the Parole Board shall arrange for the inmate to appear in person before a Parole Board panel and the panel may examine and interrogate him or her on any matters pertaining to his or her parole, including reports before the Parole Board made pursuant to the provisions of this section: *Provided,* That an inmate may appear by video teleconference if the members of the Parole Board panel conducting the examination are able to contemporaneously see the inmate and hear all of his or her remarks and if the inmate is able to contemporaneously see each of the members of the panel conducting the examination and hear all of the members' remarks: *Provided, however,* That the requirement that an inmate personally appear may be waived where a physician authorized to do so by the Commissioner of the Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation certifies that the inmate, due to a medical condition or disease, is too debilitated, either physically or cognitively, to appear. The panel shall reach its own written conclusions as to the desirability of releasing the inmate on parole and the majority of the panel

194 considering the release must concur in the decision. The superintendent shall furnish all
195 necessary assistance and cooperate to the fullest extent with the Parole Board. All information,
196 records, and reports received by the Parole Board shall be kept on permanent file.

197 (n) The Parole Board and its designated agents are at all times to have access to inmates
198 imprisoned in any state correctional facility or in any jail in this state and may obtain any
199 information or aid necessary to the performance of its duties from other departments and agencies
200 of the state or from any political subdivision of the state.

201 (o) The Parole Board shall, if requested by the Governor, investigate and consider all
202 applications for pardon, reprieve, or commutation and shall make recommendation on the
203 applications to the Governor.

204 (p) Prior to making a recommendation for pardon, reprieve or commutation, the board shall
205 notify the sentencing judge and prosecuting attorney at least 10 days before the recommendation.

206 (q) A parolee shall participate as a condition of parole in the litter control program of the
207 county to which he or she is released to the extent directed by the Parole Board, unless the board
208 specifically finds that this alternative service would be inappropriate.

209 (r) The commissioner shall develop, maintain, and make publicly available a general list of
210 rehabilitative and educational programs available outside of the correctional institutions which an
211 inmate may be required to complete as a special condition of parole pursuant to subdivision (5) of
212 subsection (b) of this section, and the manner and method in which such programs shall be
213 completed by the parolee.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to modify the sentence and parole eligibility for the crimes of murder in the second degree; modifying the parole eligibility for inmates serving life sentences and those who have been convicted of first degree murder; and modifying eligibility for attempted crimes of murder in the first and second degree.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.