

CHAPTER 217

AN ACT concerning the parole decision making process and amending P.L.1979, c.441.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. Section 10 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.54) is amended to read as follows:

C.30:4-123.54 Report prior to parole eligibility date.

10. a. At least 120 days but not more than 180 days prior to the parole eligibility date of each adult inmate, a report concerning the inmate shall be filed with the appropriate board panel, by the staff members designated by the superintendent or other chief executive officer of the institution in which the inmate is held.

b. (1) The report filed pursuant to subsection a. shall contain preincarceration records of the inmate, including any history of civil commitment, any disposition which arose out of any charges suspended pursuant to N.J.S.2C:4-6 including records of the disposition of those charges and any acquittals by reason of insanity pursuant to N.J.S.2C:4-1, state the conduct of the inmate during the current period of confinement, include a complete report on the inmate's social and physical condition, include an investigation by the Bureau of Parole of the inmate's parole plans, and present information bearing upon the likelihood that the inmate will commit a crime under the laws of this State if released on parole. The report shall also include a complete psychological evaluation of the inmate in any case in which the inmate was convicted of a first or second degree crime involving violent and:

(a) the inmate has a prior acquittal by reason of insanity pursuant to N.J.S.2C:4-1 or had charges suspended pursuant to N.J.S.2C:4-6; or

(b) the inmate has a prior conviction for murder pursuant to N.J.S.2C:11-3, aggravated sexual assault or sexual assault pursuant to N.J.S.2C:14-2, kidnapping pursuant to N.J.S.2C:13-1, endangering the welfare of a child which would constitute a crime of the second degree pursuant to N.J.S.2C:24-4, or stalking which would constitute a crime of the third degree pursuant to P.L.1992, c.209 (C.2C:12-10); or

(c) the inmate has a prior diagnosis of psychosis.

The inmate shall disclose any information concerning any history of civil commitment.

The preincarceration records of the inmate contained in the report shall include any psychological reports prepared in connection with any court proceedings.

(2) At the time of sentencing, the prosecutor shall notify any victim injured as a result of a crime of the first or second degree or the nearest relative of a murder victim of the opportunity to present a statement for the parole report to be considered at the parole hearing or to testify to the parole board concerning his harm at the time of the parole hearing. Each victim or relative shall be responsible for notifying the board of his intention to submit such a statement and to provide an appropriate mailing address.

The report may include a statement concerning the continuing nature and extent of any physical harm or psychological or emotional harm or trauma suffered by the victim, the extent of any loss of earnings or ability to work suffered by the victim and the continuing effect of the crime upon the victim's family. At the time public notice is given that an inmate is being considered for parole pursuant to this section, the board shall also notify any victim or nearest relative who has previously contacted the board of the availability to provide a statement for inclusion in the parole report or to present testimony at the parole hearing.

The board shall notify such person at his last known mailing address.

c. A copy of the report filed pursuant to subsection a. of this section, excepting those documents which have been classified as confidential pursuant to rules and regulations of the board or the Department of Corrections, shall be served on the inmate at the time it is filed with the board panel. The inmate may file with the board panel a written statement regarding the report, but shall do so within 105 days prior to the primary parole eligibility date.

d. Upon receipt of the public notice pursuant to section 1 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.45), a county prosecutor may request from the parole board a copy of the report on any adult inmate prepared pursuant to subsection a. of this section, which shall be expeditiously forwarded to the county prosecutor by the parole board by mail, courier, or other means of delivery. Upon receipt of the report, the prosecutor has 10 working days to review the report and notify the parole board of the prosecutor's comments, if any, or notify the parole

board of the prosecutor's intent to provide comments. If the county prosecutor does not provide comments or notify the parole board of the prosecutor's intent to provide comments within the 10 working days, the parole board may presume that the prosecutor does not wish to provide comments and may proceed with the parole consideration. Any comments provided by a county prosecutor shall be delivered to the parole board by the same method by which the county prosecutor received the report. The confidentiality of the contents in a report which are classified as confidential shall be maintained and shall not be disclosed to any person who is not authorized to receive or review a copy of the report containing the confidential information.

e. Any provision of this section to the contrary notwithstanding, the board shall by rule or regulation modify the scope of the required reports and time periods for rendering such reports with reference to county penal institutions.

2. Section 8 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.52) is amended to read as follows:

C.30:4-123.52 Increase or decrease of parole eligibility date, written statement to inmate, psychological evaluation.

8. a. If the appropriate board panel determines that an adult inmate has seriously or persistently violated specifically defined institutional rules or has engaged in conduct indictable in nature while incarcerated, the inmate's parole eligibility date may be increased pursuant to a schedule developed by the board. In developing such schedule, particular emphasis shall be placed on the severity of the inmate's conduct. The board shall deduct from the scheduled penalty any loss of commutation time imposed by the Department of Corrections pursuant to R.S. 30:4-140.

b. If the appropriate board panel determines that an adult inmate has made exceptional progress, as evidenced by documented participation and progress in institutional or community educational, training or other programs, the inmate's parole eligibility date may be decreased, except that no parole eligibility date shall be set below the primary parole eligibility date without the consent of the sentencing court, which need not conduct a hearing and in no case shall a parole eligibility date be set below any judicial or statutory mandatory minimum term, including any parole eligibility date set pursuant to section 23 of this act.

c. The appropriate board panel shall annually monitor the progress of each adult inmate and provide the inmate with a written statement of any changes in his parole eligibility.

d. At any time while an inmate is committed to the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections, the appropriate board panel or the Parole Board may require, as often as it deems necessary, that inmate to undergo an in-depth preparole psychological evaluation conducted by a psychologist employed by the Parole Board or, where appropriate after consultation with the Department of Corrections, by a psychologist at the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center, to provide current and accurate information to assess the inmate's suitability for parole.

e. Prior to the parole eligibility date of each adult inmate, an objective risk assessment shall be performed by board staff. The risk assessment, which shall be in a form prescribed by the board pursuant to rule and regulation, shall consist of both static and dynamic factors which may assist the board panel in determining whether the inmate shall be certified for parole and, if paroled, the level of supervision the parolee may require. In addition to the information otherwise gathered for and incorporated in the pre-parole report, the assessment shall include evaluations of the inmate's ability to function independently, the inmate's educational and employment background, the inmate's family and marital history, and such other information and factors as the board may deem appropriate and necessary.

3. Section 11 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.55) is amended to read as follows:

C.30:4-123.55 Review of reports, risk assessment, inmate's statement; certification, denial of parole; hearing.

11. a. Prior to the parole eligibility date of each adult inmate, a designated hearing officer shall review the reports required by section 10 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.54), and shall determine whether there is a basis for denial of parole in the preparole report, any risk

assessment prepared in accordance with the provisions of subsection e. of section 8 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.52), or the inmate's statement, or an indication, reduced to writing, that additional information providing a basis for denial of parole would be developed or produced at a hearing. If the hearing officer determines that there is no basis in the preparole report, the risk assessment, or the inmate's statement for denial of parole and that there is no additional relevant information to be developed or produced at a hearing, he shall at least 60 days prior to the inmate's parole eligibility date recommend in writing to the assigned member of the board panel that parole release be granted.

b. If the assigned member of the board panel or in the case of an inmate sentenced to a county penal institution, the assigned member concurs in the hearing officer's recommendation, he shall certify parole release pursuant to section 15 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.59) as soon as practicable after the eligibility date and so notify the inmate and the board. In the case of an inmate sentenced to a county penal institution the board shall certify parole release or deny parole as provided by this section, except with regard to time periods for notice and parole processing which are authorized by or otherwise adopted pursuant to subsection g. of section 7 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.51). If the designated hearing officer does not recommend release on parole or if the assigned member does not concur in a recommendation of the designated hearing officer in favor of release, then the parole release of an inmate in a county penal institution shall be treated under the provisions of law otherwise applicable to an adult inmate. In the case of an inmate sentenced to a county penal institution, the performance of public service for the remainder of the term of the sentence shall be a required condition of parole, where appropriate.

c. If the hearing officer or the assigned member determines that there is a basis for denial of parole, or that a hearing is otherwise necessary, the hearing officer or assigned member shall notify the appropriate board panel and the inmate in writing of his determination, and of a date for a parole consideration hearing. The board panel shall notify the victim of the crime, if the crime for which the inmate is incarcerated was a crime of the first or second degree, or the victim's nearest relative if the crime was murder, as appropriate, who was previously contacted by the board and who has indicated his intention to the board to testify at the hearing, of the opportunity to testify or submit written statements at the hearing. Said hearing shall be conducted by the appropriate board panel at least 30 days prior to the eligibility date. At the hearing, which shall be informal, the board panel shall receive as evidence any relevant and reliable documents or in person testimony, including that of the victim of the crime or the members of the family of a murder victim if the victim or a family member so desires. If a victim of a crime or the relative of a murder victim chooses not to testify personally at the hearing, the victim or relative may elect to present testimony to a senior hearing officer designated by the board panel. The senior hearing officer shall prepare a report or a transcript of the testimony for presentation to the board panel at the hearing. All such evidence not classified as confidential pursuant to rules and regulations of the board or the Department of Corrections shall be disclosed to the inmate and the inmate shall be permitted to rebut such evidence and to present evidence on his own behalf. The decision of the board panel shall be based solely on the evidence presented at the hearing.

d. At the conclusion of the parole consideration hearing, the board panel shall either (1) certify the parole release of the inmate pursuant to section 15 of this act as soon as practicable after the eligibility date and so notify the inmate and the board, or (2) deny parole and file with the board within 30 days of the hearing a statement setting forth the decision, the particular reasons therefor, except information classified as confidential pursuant to rules and regulations of the board or the Department of Corrections, a copy of which statement shall be served upon the inmate together with notice of his right to appeal to the board.

e. Upon request by the hearing officer or the inmate, the time limitations contained in section 10 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.54) and this section may be waived by the appropriate board panel for good cause.

f. Notwithstanding the provision of any other law to the contrary, if an inmate incarcerated for murder is recommended for parole by the assigned board member or the appropriate board panel, parole shall not be certified until a majority of the full parole board, after conducting a

hearing, concurs in that recommendation. The board shall notify the victim's family of that hearing and family members shall be afforded the opportunity to testify in person or to submit written statements. The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to an inmate who has his parole revoked and is returned to custody pursuant to the provisions of section 19 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.63).

4. This act shall take effect immediately; except that notwithstanding the provisions of subsection e. of section 8 of P.L.1979, c.441 (C.30:4-123.52), no objective risk assessment shall be required until the first day of the sixth month following enactment.

Approved August 19, 1997.