

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4761

By Delegates Funkhouser, Akers, B. Ward, J.

Cannon, Ferrell, Hanshaw (Mr. Speaker), McCormick,

Ellington, Phillips, Ridenour, and Hall

[Introduced January 22, 2026; referred to the

Committee on the Judiciary]

A BILL to amend and reenact §61-2-3, §61-11-8, and §62-12-13 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to parole eligibility; modifying 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; and permitting the prosecutor and the victim's families to attend the parole hearings remotely or in person.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

CHAPTER 61. CRIMES AND THEIR PUNISHMENTS.

ARTICLE 2. CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON.

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

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

ARTICLE 11. GENERAL PROVISIONS CONCERNING CRIMES

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

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

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

(2) If the offense attempted be punishable by imprisonment in the penitentiary for a term less than life, such person shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction, shall, in the discretion of the court, either be imprisoned in the penitentiary for not less than one nor more than three years,

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.

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 minor child;

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

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

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

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

(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 action;

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

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

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

91 (c) Except in the case of an inmate serving a life sentence, a person who has been
92 previously twice convicted of a felony may not be released on parole until he or she has served the
93 minimum term provided by law for the crime for which he or she was convicted. An inmate
94 sentenced for life may not be paroled until he or she has served 10 years, and an inmate
95 sentenced for life who has been previously twice convicted of a felony may not be paroled until he
96 or she has served 15 years: *Provided*, That an inmate convicted of first degree murder for an
97 offense committed on or after ~~June 10, 1994~~ July 1, 2026, is not eligible for parole until he or she
98 has served ~~15~~ 25 years.

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

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

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

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

116 (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 subdivision 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-

169 8C-1 *et seq.* of this code, the Parole Board panel may not waive the report required by this
170 subsection. The report shall include a study and diagnosis of the inmate, including an on-going
171 treatment plan requiring active participation in sexual abuse counseling at an approved mental
172 health facility or through some other approved program: *Provided, however,* That nothing
173 disclosed by the inmate during the study or diagnosis may be made available to any law-
174 enforcement agency, or other party without that inmate's consent, or admissible in any court of this
175 state, unless the information disclosed indicates the intention or plans of the parolee to do harm to
176 any person, animal, institution, or to property. Progress reports of outpatient treatment are to be
177 made at least every six months to the parole officer supervising the parolee. In addition, in such
178 cases, the Parole Board shall inform the prosecuting attorney of the county in which the person
179 was convicted of the parole hearing and shall request that the prosecuting attorney inform the
180 Parole Board of the circumstances surrounding a conviction or plea of guilty, plea bargaining, and
181 other background information that might be useful in its deliberations.

182 (m) Before releasing any inmate on parole, the Parole Board shall arrange for the inmate to
183 appear in person before a Parole Board panel and the panel may examine and interrogate him or
184 her on any matters pertaining to his or her parole, including reports before the Parole Board made
185 pursuant to the provisions of this section: *Provided,* That an inmate may appear by video
186 teleconference if the members of the Parole Board panel conducting the examination are able to
187 contemporaneously see the inmate and hear all of his or her remarks and if the inmate is able to
188 contemporaneously see each of the members of the panel conducting the examination and hear
189 all of the members' remarks: *Provided, however,* That the requirement that an inmate personally
190 appear may be waived where a physician authorized to do so by the Commissioner of the Division
191 of Corrections and Rehabilitation certifies that the inmate, due to a medical condition or disease, is
192 too debilitated, either physically or cognitively, to appear. The panel shall reach its own written
193 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

necessary assistance and cooperate to the fullest extent with the Parole Board. All information, records, and reports received by the Parole Board shall be kept on permanent file.

(1) The Prosecuting Attorney or his or her appointee from the county that prosecuted the defendant on the charges for which he is being considered for paroled may attend the parole in person or remotely; and

(2) The victim's family may attend the parole in person or remotely.

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

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

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

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

(r) The commissioner shall develop, maintain, and make publicly available a general list of rehabilitative and educational programs available outside of the correctional institutions which an inmate may be required to complete as a special condition of parole pursuant to subdivision (5) of subsection (b) of this section, and the manner and method in which such programs shall be 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, and allowing the victim's family and prosecutor to attend the parole hearings in person or remotely.

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