



*Please Note: The information contained in this Guide is not intended as legal advice in any individual's case. There are many exceptions and variations in the parole consideration process. If you have questions, please consult with an experienced parole attorney.*

## **HOW TO WRITE A CLOSING STATEMENT**

This Guide is intended to help you through the process of writing a closing statement for your parole hearing. Toward the end of the hearing, you have the opportunity to make a closing statement. Your closing statement is an opportunity for you to give a short statement taking accountability for your crimes, and showing remorse to the victims/next of kin or survivors of your crime.

### **I. What is a closing statement?**

The closing statement is the portion of the parole hearing in which you can speak uninterrupted and unprompted. Your closing statement is an opportunity to remind the Board that you are accountable and remorseful for your actions, and you acknowledge the impact of the harm you caused.

### **II. When do I give my closing statement?**

You, your attorney, and the District Attorney all have the opportunity to give closing statements at the end of the hearing. Your closing statement will be after your attorney's, and before the survivor or victim's next of kin, provide their statements. After the victims/survivors speak, the Board will leave to deliberate before returning and providing their decision.

### **III. What should I say in my closing statement?**

Everyone's closing statement is different, and there is no one "right" way to do it. We recommend centering your accountability and remorse. Focusing on the people you harmed not only gives you space to demonstrate your remorse, but it also helps reinforce your understanding of the commitment offense and insight you have gained. A strong closing statement typically includes: (1) taking accountability for your actions; (2) demonstrating a deep understanding of the impacts on the victims and their next of kin; (3) and expressing genuine remorse for the harm you caused.

#### **IV. What should I avoid talking about in my closing statement?**

Your hearing will have already covered most, if not all, of your positive programs and achievements, so we encourage you to focus on your remorse and accountability during your closing statement. Your closing statement is not a good time to clarify answers from your hearing, rebut what the District Attorney said, or make other comments to the Board. If there is something that you think should be covered, but it may come across as argumentative, discuss it with your attorney beforehand so they can add it to their closing statement. The closing statement is the last thing the Board will hear from you, so it is important to focus your statement on your remorse and accountability.

#### **V. Should I prepare a written statement or speak from the heart?**

We recommend that you write your closing statement in advance and read the statement at your hearing. Having a written closing statement helps to ensure that you remain focused on accountability, impact, and remorse. It also may provide a sense of security when it is your time to share. Parole hearings can be very exhausting, so it is nice to not have to worry about what you want to say as the hearing wraps up. When you deliver a clear, well thought out, and focused closing

statement, you send a message to the Board that you take this opportunity seriously, from beginning to the end, and have done everything you can to be found suitable for parole.

## **VI. How should I draft my closing statement?**

Everyone has a different approach for processing and communicating difficult emotions. Here are some strategies that we have seen work for people going through the parole process. We encourage you to do what feels authentic and right for you.

- Think about the message you want to send with your closing statement. What do you want your victims/survivors to know about you? What do you want the Board to know?
- Write the first draft without worrying about punctuation, spelling, or how your writing looks. This may reduce barriers to writing and open your creative pathways.
- Revise your drafts until you feel like you have drafted a strong closing statement that is a good balance of accountability, impact, and remorse.
- Avoid using generic language. To help the Board see that your feelings are genuine, use language that is specific and personal. It should be clear that your closing statement could have only been written by you, about the victims/survivors in your case.
- Use active, not passive language. For example, write “I killed my victim,” instead of “my victim was killed.” Using active rather than passive language helps to show the Board that you are not minimizing your role or deflecting blame.

## **VII. How long should it take me to read my closing statement at the hearing?**

You are allowed to speak for 10 minutes. However, generally 3-5 minutes is enough time to communicate accountability, impact, and remorse without being repetitive.