

Tips for Writing an Effective Letter of Support

Purpose:

To persuade the Board of Pardons and Parole (BP&P) to grant your loved one parole.

Key Elements of a Persuasive Letter of Support:

1. **Humanize your LO!** Your LO is not a DOC ID# and is not defined by the crime(s) s/he was convicted of. Show BP&P who your LO is by including brief information about their life outside of prison: who and what is important to your LO, how they spend their time, a short reference to an experience you had with that person.
 - a. *Ex. My brother loved to watch movies. One day he convinced me to watch a marathon of action movies. I nearly fell asleep bc I was so bored!*
2. **Explain who you are and what your role has been in your LO's life.**
 - a. Provide brief information regarding where you live (it is not necessary to provide your address unless your LO will be living with you), your educational background and your job/career.
 - b. Are you LO's wife, mother, sister? How much time did you spend together prior to this incarceration?
 - c. What has your role been while your LO has been incarcerated? Do you visit regularly? Talk weekly? Send books? Write letters?
3. **Explain what role you will play in that person's return to life outside of prison.**
 - i. *Ex. Will your LO be living with you? Will you help you LO with transportation (to and from work, to parole/probation appointments etc.)? Will you be financially supporting your LO until s/he returns to work?*
4. **Explain why you know that your LO is ready to be released and you have no doubt that your LO will not re-offend (return to jail/prison).**
 - i. What changes (be specific) has your LO undergone during incarceration?
 - ii. Avoid generalized and cliché comments unless you support those statements with specific facts.
 1. *Ex. Don't say "He has really changed" without saying "I can see that he has changed because while he used to talk non-stop about unimportant things like ABC, now he is focused on....getting a job in X field Or being a good role model for his children" etc.*
 2. *Don't say "He has really learned his lesson." Instead, explain why you believe this to be true. Has your LO said something to you that makes you believe this? Has your LO sent you a letter or email that lead you to this belief? There is no reason why you can't include a quote of something your LO has written or said (as long as s/he is ok with that).*

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Tips on What Not to Say

- Don't explain **why** you think your LO is in prison. This is part of what s/he should include in the parole package (if s/he chooses to submit one).
- Don't say anything that disputes your LO's guilt or blames anyone for the crime besides your LO.
- Don't try to convince BPaP that your LO is innocent. While you may believe/know that your LO is completely innocent, these statements will not help your LO get parole. If this is what you believe, it is best not to comment on the subject of guilt/innocence.
- Don't focus on how much you need your LO to be home for any reason (financial support, help with taking care of kids etc.), no matter how accurate it may be. The BPP needs to know that your LO will be successful upon release: that s/he will be a productive citizen who works and isn't dependent on government support and that your LO will not re-offend.
- Don't mention anyone you know who served less time on the same crime or anything similar.

*DO include a picture of you and your LO together, prior to incarceration (if this type of picture is available).

REMEMBER:

The goal in writing a letter of support is to convince BPaP that your LO should be granted parole. To persuade BPaP to do this, we must show that your LO has benefited in some way from being incarcerated (a.k.a. learned their lesson) and that s/he will not re-offend.