

JOE COLEMAN MEDICAL RELEASE HANDBOOK:

A Guide for Incarcerated People, Their Loved Ones, and Attorneys Illinois Prison Project, Updated August 2025

This handbook is intended to be used for the preparation of Joe Coleman Medical Release Act (“Joe Coleman Act”) applications. It can be used by anyone who wants to help a person incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to file a request for release based on terminal illness and/or medical incapacitation.

This handbook is intended to be educational only. While we will try to provide as much information as possible about what we know about the Joe Coleman Act and its implementation generally, we do NOT know the specifics of your situation and the information here does NOT constitute legal advice.

- A note about language: Because this handbook will be used by incarcerated people, their family members, and attorneys, we have called the incarcerated person seeking relief “the applicant” throughout.

I. How should I use this handbook?

This handbook provides information about how someone can help an incarcerated person file an application for release under the Joe Coleman Act. You may choose to use this document together with Illinois Prison Project’s Joe Coleman Act Medical Release template. This document provides background information to help you answer all of the questions on that template, but you don’t need to try to answer every single question in this guide in order to complete an application. **You must include a fully completed Prisoner Review Board’s medical release application with your submission, which can be found [here](#).** Anything beyond that form is supplementary.

II. What to know before you begin?

What is medical release?

Medical release is a process by which terminally ill or medically incapacitated people can seek to have their sentence ended early. The Joe Coleman Act grants the Prisoner Review Board the authority to release terminally ill or medically incapacitated people from their prison sentences. The Joe Coleman Act took effect on January 1, 2022. The power to release an individual from their sentence early stems from the Governor’s clemency powers, so there are no courts or judges involved in the process at all.

The Joe Coleman Act does not prevent an incarcerated person from simultaneously seeking other forms of relief, such as clemency, resentencing, or post-conviction relief. People who are terminally ill, medically incapacitated, or have a condition that will make them medically incapacitated within six months are encouraged to apply for medical release even if they have a pending clemency petition or petition for post-conviction relief.

Who is eligible for medical release?

Incarcerated people are eligible for medical release if they are **medically incapacitated** or have been diagnosed with a condition **that will cause medical incapacitation in the next six months**, or if they have a **terminal illness**. The specific definitions of these terms, as laid out in the Coleman Act include:

- A person is **medically incapacitated** if:
 - They have been diagnosed with a medical condition that **prevents them from completing more than one activity of daily living** (like bathing, dressing, or mobility) without assistance or disables them to the point that prison does not create any additional restrictions. The person is only eligible if the medical condition is unlikely to improve noticeably in the future, and if the injury or illness that caused medical incapacitation occurred after sentencing or was not taken into account at the time of sentencing. This definition explicitly includes cognitive conditions like dementia.
- A **terminal illness** is a condition that is irreversible and incurable and, based on an individual assessment by a doctor, **likely to cause death within 18 months**.

Who reviews and decides on medical release applications?

Medical release applications are filed with the Prisoner Review Board. For a petition to proceed to a hearing, a physician or nurse practitioner from the Department of Corrections, or working with the Department of Corrections, will first have to certify that a person is eligible for release—for example, that they are terminally ill or medically incapacitated. **ONLY** once that certification has occurred will a petition even be considered by the members of the PRB. Once the IDOC medical official determines that the applicant is eligible for medical release, a three member panel of the PRB will then hold either a public or non-public hearing (depending on which option the applicant selects on the form) and decide the outcome of the application. The Governor does not make a decision regarding any medical release application.

How quickly will the PRB decide?

The Prisoner Review Board docket medical releases as they are filed; unlike in clemency, there are no filing deadlines. Medical release decisions should be made within 90 days of when the application is filed.

Under the Crime Victim's Bill of Rights, any registered victim has the right to provide input to the PRB before a decision is made; that means that if there is a *registered* victim in the applicant's case, no decision can be made until the victim has been notified of the application and been given 30 days to respond. This will not extend the process beyond the 90 days set forth in the law, but may mean that an emergency application cannot be decided for at least 30 days.

III. What to do before you begin?

Before you begin, make sure that you have a plan for how you will finalize and send the application.

The Prisoner Review Board requires that their application form be included in the filing; you will need to either type your responses into their PDF application, or print it out and write in your answers. If you are using IPP's Joe Coleman Act Template, you should submit that *in addition* to the PRB's application. The PRB's application can be found [here](#). You will also need to gather additional documentation, such as medical records and letters of support. After you have gathered the documents, you will need to organize them into a single package to be mailed or faxed to the PRB.

IV. What information will I need to include in the Medical Release Application?

Required Information from the PRB Form

The PRB requires that all medical release applications include the following information in their application.

1. Applicant's Personal Information:

- Full name
- Holding Facility (prison where they are incarcerated)
- Date of Birth
- Place of Birth
- Any aliases, including the applicant's maiden name or married name if they are different from their name right now.
- Social Security Number
- State Prisoner Number
- If there has been any prior clemency request (month and year of consideration, if you know)
- Any prior medical release requests (including application number and date of denial)

2. Information about the Convictions for which Medical Release is Sought

You'll include information about any active sentences. To determine if a sentence is active, ask your counselor, or have a loved one check the "Individuals in Custody" page on the Illinois Department of Corrections website. If a sentence is active, a red "NO" will appear under the docket number next to the word "Discharged."

You are required to provide the following information about the conviction for which medical release is sought:

- Offense of Conviction
- Case Number
- County of Conviction

- **Applicant's Version of the Offense:** This question requires a longer answer than some of the other questions. If you are supporting a person in prison, you will need to work with them to help them provide a detailed statement about the basic facts of what happened during the offense. This includes dates, places, and the surrounding circumstances. Unless there is a compelling innocence claim, most attorneys recommend that a person filing for medical release both accept responsibility for the offense and express remorse.

3. Diagnostic Medical Criteria

You will be asked to check at least one of three boxes on the PRB's medical release application. You can check more than one box depending on the applicant's medical condition. Remember, medically incapacitated means that they need assistance with at least two activities of daily living (eating, getting into/out of bed or chair, toilet hygiene, bathing or showering, getting dressed, personal hygiene, walking/climbing stairs, safety/emergency response).

Check one of the following boxes on the PRB's form, or all that apply:

- Applicant is suffering from a terminal illness that is likely to cause death within 18 months
- Applicant has been diagnosed with a medical condition that will result in medical incapacity within the next six months
- Applicant has become medically incapacitated subsequent to sentencing due to illness or injury

Importantly, although the formal application does not require it, you should include information about the applicant's medical (physical or cognitive) condition, and include copies of any medical records that support your claim. The applicant is entitled to a copy of their medical records from their institution. Please note that medical records can be difficult and time-consuming to obtain, but it is important to provide documents that support your claims regarding the person's health and/or diagnosis. *You can find more information about how to request medical records from IDOC and from outside hospitals and providers in the "Frequently Asked Questions" section at the end of this toolkit.* You will want to include the following information:

- Diagnosis (the specific illness or injury) and prognosis (the way the disease or injury progressed, the way it is likely to progress, and any likelihood of recovery).
- Any and all medications, recent surgeries and hospitalizations, specialized treatments, etc. If in doubt, include more health-related information than less.
- Any ways that the applicant's health conditions impair their mobility, strength, or theoretical ability to reoffend.

- Any accommodations they *currently receive*. Examples include wheelchair permit, bunk or lower gallery permit, assigned aid, and placement in the permanent infirmary unit.
- If the applicant has complicated medical needs, be sure to talk about how they will be addressed and cared for in the community. For example, if the applicant needs a wheelchair, be sure to note that any proposed housing has a ramp, elevator, or other accommodation.

INCLUDE: a limited number of medical records that reflect the applicant's diagnosis, prognosis, disease progression, and impact on activities of daily living (i.e. lower bunk permit, wheelchair permit, aide).

4. Parole Plan

You will be asked to provide host site information. Host sites are either private residences or facilities (like nursing homes, transitional housing, or other managed facilities). You will also be asked if the applicant will accept a placement secured by the Department of Corrections, should the proposed placement not work out.

- If the parole site is a private residence, please include:
 - Name of homeowner or leaseholder
 - Address
 - Phone number
 - Relationship to the applicant
 - Indicate whether someone at the residence will be able to care for the applicant
- If the parole site is a facility, please provide:
 - Name
 - Address

Because medical release cases are based on the applicant's terminal illness or medical incapacity, it is important that the release plan accounts for the high level of support applicants will likely need if released. Release plans ideally should include information about who will be present to take care of the applicant, provide meals, hygiene, etc. Release plans should also talk about who can take the applicant to medical appointments, whether or not the applicant can continue seeing the same outside doctor, any caretaking or medical expertise within the family, whether the home is wheelchair accessible, etc. This information can also be further corroborated by letters of support from family or friends who can tell the Board about their willingness to assist with caring for the person, should they be granted medical release.

Optional to include: Letters of support from people in the community are not required, but they can be very powerful, and you should include as many as you can. Letters from people who are

part of the applicant's reentry plan are especially important. A template is included at the end of this handbook. Applicants can also gather letters of support from other incarcerated people, prison volunteers, or prison staff to be attached to the application.

Optional Further Information to Consider Including

The PRB recommends that you include the following information. If you are using IPP's Template, you'll see a place to include this information. We recommend that, if possible, you include this information to give the PRB a deeper understanding of the applicant as a person and why the applicant warrants medical release. What you ultimately include will depend on the applicant's unique circumstances and what information is available to you.

You should include supporting documents wherever possible. *We've included examples of supporting documents in italics at the end of each section.*

a. Statutory Factors

It is recommended to explicitly address the following statutory factors outlined in the Joe Coleman Act in as much detail as you can:

- (i) the individual's diagnosis and likelihood of recovery;
- (ii) the approximate cost of health care to the State should the individual remain in custody;
- (iii) the impact that the individual's continued incarceration may have on the provision of medical care within the Department;
- (iv) the present likelihood of and ability to pose a substantial danger to the physical safety of a specifically identifiable person or persons;
- (vi) whether the individual's condition was explicitly disclosed to the original sentencing judge and taken into account at the time of sentencing.

b. Applicant's Personal Life History

If possible, it can be helpful to write a short personal life history, written out like a story, of the applicant. Below are some topics that you might address in this section to develop a full life history. A successful application will help the PRB understand what the applicant's life has been like, especially any struggles, traumas or hardships they have been through. Below are some questions that can help you write that story, but you do not need to answer every question here. Submitting a concise life history of one page or a few pages is fine, as the focus for the Board will still be on the applicant's qualifying medical condition.

- **Childhood:** This could include: What was the applicant's childhood like and who was in their home? Was there enough food and money for the family to be comfortable, or were basic necessities a struggle? Did the applicant grow up in a neighborhood where they felt unsafe, whether from violence, drugs, or trouble at home? Was the applicant ever abused— physically, verbally, or sexually— as a child, or did they witness that abuse of someone else? Were they a parent in their teens or face homelessness as a child?
- **Employment History:** This could include: Where did the applicant work, and for how long? Include if the applicant particularly enjoyed or excelled at any position or had dreams of specific employment and why that was or wasn't possible.
- **Hardships and Violence as a Child and/or Adult:** This could include: Did the applicant experience or witness specific hardships, trauma, domestic violence, gang violence or other violence for any reason? Were they in any serious accidents that caused serious or permanent, or life-threatening injuries? Were they the victim of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse?
- **Educational History:** This could include: Where did the applicant go to school? Did they excel academically, or struggle in school? Were they in special classes, or did they have a learning disability? How far did they get in school? If they did not graduate, why not?
- **Marital Status/Personal Relationships/Life as a Parent or Caregiver:** This could include a description of the **applicant's relationship with any partners or spouses**, including how and when they met, whether they live together, and any related information. This could also include **the names and ages of any biological, adopted or step-children** and details about the applicant's role as an active and loving parent. It could also include other family members or loved ones who support or play a major role in the applicant's life. Examples include siblings, nieces/nephews, grandparents, etc. The purpose of this section is to show how much support the applicant has in the community, and how important the applicant's release is to their loved ones.

Optional to include: Photos of applicant with their partner, letters from partner in support of release, a description of any health or other formal benefits (i.e. health insurance, dental insurance, disability insurance) that the applicant might receive through their partner if released. Photos of the applicant with their children and/or family members, letters from their loved ones in support of release.

- **Substance Abuse History:** This could include if the applicant has a prior history of drug or alcohol use that might explain their involvement in the criminal justice system. Include

when the applicant began using substances and any factors that contributed to the applicant's substance use, e.g. injury from an accident, peer pressure, gang involvement. If the applicant's substance use played a role in the instant offense (e.g. if the applicant committed a robbery to sustain a drug habit), describe the applicant's substance use around the time of the offense, including frequency of use, quantity, and drug(s) of choice.

- Please describe any drug or alcohol treatment the applicant has participated in, or any independent efforts the applicant has made to address their substance use. If the applicant has not been able to obtain treatment, please plainly state that fact.
- **Mental Health Information:** This could include if the applicant has any prior mental health diagnoses, especially if they are now being successfully treated through medication or therapy. Include when they were first diagnosed, hospitalized, and/or treated. Describe the impact the applicant's mental health diagnosis or symptoms have had on their life.

INCLUDE: Any certificates or awards for the completion of substance abuse or mental health courses, a limited number of mental health records.

- **Military Records and/or Awards, if the applicant served in the military.** This could include why they joined, their highest rank, what they especially enjoyed or disliked about any portion of service. It could also include if they received special training or recognition, where they served, if they saw combat and if they were injured. Did they suffer long-term side effects related to service, such as PTSD? You could also comment on how serving affected them and if they struggled to return back to civilian society.

INCLUDE: DD214, commendations, any other awards, documentation confirming V.A. benefits

c. Rehabilitation/Institutional Adjustment

The purpose of this section is to focus on explaining to the Board how the person has spent their time while incarcerated and include any evidence of how that time was spent productively or contributing in various ways, both formal and informal.

- **Degrees, Diplomas, Licenses and Awards: (earned or anticipated)** This section could include any educational courses or licensing the applicant has finished or is pursuing during incarceration (though it could include mention of education that occurred before entering prison as well). You could also include programs the applicant is hoping to take

while in prison, if possible given their health problems and/or whether the applicant is on the waitlist for any courses, programs, or other educational or vocational training. You could also include any licenses or certifications that the applicant received. For example, if the applicant earned their barbering license while in prison, or if they become certified as an AIDS Peer Educator. This section could also include any awards or commendations that the applicant has received.

INCLUDE: Any degrees or diplomas, transcripts, graded assignments, notes from staff indicating that an application's request to enroll in a program has been received. Proof of any awards or commendations. Proof of any licenses or certifications, or transcripts from coursework that went into that license or certification. If the original document has been lost, a letter from the person who recognized the applicant (i.e. supervisor, employer, correctional officer/counselor) acknowledging the commendation is a good substitute!

- **Counseling or Rehabilitation Programs Attended or Completed:** This could include anger management, group counseling, parenting classes, and many other courses offered by the Department of Corrections. Similarly, informal group sessions like Bible study might also be considered to be a rehabilitative program.

INCLUDE: Proof of any participation and completion of any counseling or programming, which often come with certificates of completion. If the original document has been lost, simply list and describe the programs—informal or formal—that the applicant participated in. Proof of group and individual counseling can often be found in an applicant's mental health records.

- **Important Life Events During Incarceration:** This helps give the PRB a sense of the person the applicant has become during the course of incarceration. If possible, the application should show the PRB the ways in which the applicant has become **rehabilitated** over the course of their incarceration. This could include hobbies that have been important or fulfilling, their religious life, or meaningful relationships they have formed. If the applicant has had a work history while incarcerated, describe the jobs they held and any details about them. Did they especially enjoy a particular job? If so, why?

*INCLUDE: **Disciplinary card** if it shows minimal infractions, examples of the applicant's hobbies (i.e. art, poetry, essays, photographs), letters from incarcerated friends or correctional officers. An incarcerated person can request a copy of their disciplinary card directly from their counselor.*

V. How to Submit the Application

Signature

Whoever files the application (e.g. applicant, family member, representative, physician, or attorney) must sign it, and must include the following language:

“I declare under penalty of perjury that all of the assertions made in this petition are complete, true, and accurate.”

Examples of what this looks like in context can be found on IPP’s Sample Joe Coleman Application and Template.

Filing

You may file the application by email, fax, or the mail. If you are able to have a loved one email your application for you, this is the quickest way to ensure rapid processing.

- To file by email (through a loved one):
 - Send a pdf copy of the application to PRB.MedicalRelease@Illinois.gov. All documents must be included as a direct email attachment (e.g. PDFs) and must be in legible form.
- To file by fax (through a loved one):
 - Fax a copy to (217) 524-0012, Attn: Medical Release Act
- To file by mail:
 - Mail a copy of the completed application to: Prisoner Review Board, Attn: Medical Release Act, 1001 N. Walnut Street, Springfield, IL 62702

VI. Docketing/Scheduling

Once a petition is received by the PRB, they will reach out to IDOC to have a physician or nurse practitioner at the facility complete a medical evaluation stating whether or not the person qualifies for the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act; specifically, that the applicant has a diagnosis or condition that renders them terminally ill or medically incapacitated.

Once the IDOC physician has certified that the applicant is eligible for medical release, the application will be placed on the PRB’s docket for a decision. If the physician says that the person is *not* eligible, the application will not be placed on the PRB docket, although the PRB will retain the application for 60 days in case something changes with the applicant’s medical condition.

Once “docketed,” the PRB will send you, your loved one, or your attorney a letter with your application’s docket number, and the date of the public hearing (if you requested one). The letter will also give you a date by which to send in any additional materials that you want the PRB to

consider, like new medical records or letters of support. This date is usually two weeks before the public hearing.

VII. Hearing

Applicants are entitled to a public hearing if they select that option on the form. The hearing takes place virtually on an internet platform called WebEx. After the passage of Senate Bill 19 (Public Act 104-0011) in June 2025, this new law gives incarcerated people the right to attend their medical release hearings by video. Applicants or attorneys may waive this right.

Up to four witnesses can speak at the hearing. Putting a “face” to the application is extremely important, if possible to do; for that reason, if the applicant has loved ones who are able to appear at the hearing, we highly recommend requesting a public hearing. Witnesses can help the PRB understand the severity of the applicant’s illness or condition, ways in which the applicant has changed or grown during their incarceration, and the ways in which they will support the applicant if the petition is granted.

The hearing is a chance to provide new details about the medical condition, and to show the PRB that the applicant has people outside of prison who care about them and will help them take care of their medical needs upon release. Try to think about what are the most important points that you want to convey to the PRB at the hearing, and whether there is any important information that wasn’t already addressed in your filing.

The PRB will NOT want you to read from the application that you already filed, and they may stop you if you start to do this. This is also not the place to talk about the original trial, or how the applicant was wrongly or unfairly convicted; you want to keep the focus on how sick the applicant is, and why they qualify for medical release.

The State’s Attorney has the right to attend your hearing and express opposition, and any registered victims (or their representatives) also have the right to either attend the hearing or to submit letters of opposition. If they do attend the hearing, they will be given an opportunity to speak, and once they are finished, the applicant’s witnesses will have the opportunity to respond. You will probably want to keep your response short, and focused on the severity of the applicant’s medical condition and why they qualify for medical release. If the applicant has talked to you about their remorse, you may also want to talk about that.

After everyone is given a chance to testify, the Prisoner Review Board has the right to go into closed session to discuss the case privately. After this session, they return to the Webex and make a public vote. At least two out of three board members must vote in favor of granting release for the application to be successful.

VIII. Release

If the application is granted, the PRB will notify IDOC, who will confirm the applicant's release plan and then have someone from field services go and inspect the parole site. Once the parole site has been approved, the applicant will be released. If the applicant does not have a release plan in place—for example, if they need nursing-home level care and a bed has not yet been secured—IDOC will work to find an appropriate placement. This can take some time.

People granted medical release will have to serve *five years of Mandatory Supervised release*, or a term of MSR equal to the remainder of their original sentence and MSR term, whichever is longer. In some instances, MSR has been terminated early for people who are reaching the end of their lives or are hospitalized, but there is no guarantee that MSR will be terminated early.

In granting a medical release, the PRB can include parole conditions such as electronic monitoring or a curfew, which will not be known until after the person is released. In the hearing, it may be helpful to state clearly that the applicant will abide by all conditions of parole and that family members will support their compliance.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I have to write a whole petition in order to apply for medical release?

Technically, the only thing that you have to submit when applying for medical release is the completed PRB form, available on their website. If your loved one or client is really sick and you're worried that they only have a few months left to live, you might consider just filing the PRB application and then supplementing later with a full petition and exhibits such as medical records, disciplinary card, letters of support, etc.

2. How do I get medical and/or mental health records from the Illinois Department of Corrections?

The applicant is entitled to a copy of their medical records from the Department of Corrections. The fastest way to get their records is to have the applicant request them from the prison's Medical Records department. If people outside of prison need those records to include with a medical release petition, the applicant can mail those records directly to you. For a snapshot of the applicant's medical history, ask for their "Problem List" and current medications, both of which they can obtain from Medical Records.

If a person outside of prison would like to request these records from the Department of Corrections, the applicant must first sign the Department of Corrections' medical information release form, which you can find [here](#). The signed release form must be faxed or mailed to the Medical Records department at the applicant's correctional institution. Because each institution has different rules about how to submit medical records requests, people outside prison should call the institution and ask to speak to "Medical Records" for guidance from the applicant's specific institution. Please note that it can take a long time to receive these records, sometimes even months, so you should request them as early as possible.

When you receive the notification of the hearing date – assuming that the medical officer at the facility has written in their evaluation that the applicant is eligible for medical release – you may be able to request a copy of the memo that the medical officer at the facility completed and returned to the PRB. You can email the PRB and ask for this memo, but the PRB might ask you for a written release form. This release form should be signed by the applicant and say that the PRB has permission to share this information with you. If you receive a copy of the memo, it can be helpful to echo and reinforce the content of this evaluation during your public hearing, if you requested one.

3. The applicant received medical and/or mental health treatment at an outside hospital while incarcerated. How do I get medical and/or mental health records from them?

You are highly encouraged to provide *relevant* medical records from outside hospitals or providers. If you are filing on your own behalf, you may already have copies of your medical records from outside providers. If you do not, you can ask your providers directly for copies, or you can ask the health care administrator at your institution to give you copies.

If you need to obtain medical records from a community hospital or provider and are working on behalf of a loved one or client, you will need explicit, written permission from the applicant before you can get these records. First, you should identify the name of the hospital or provider, call their medical records department, and ask for a copy of their HIPAA release form. This form can also typically be found on the provider's website. Once you have a copy of the release, you should send it to the applicant and ask them to fill it out, sign, and return it to you. You can then use this form to request medical records on behalf of the applicant.

You should be prepared to pay a small fee for medical records from providers; typically they charge per page. If cost is an issue, you might consider just requesting a limited number of records, or records from a small window of time.

4. Where can I find the information about the applicant's current and/or previous cases (i.e. judge, sentencing date, etc.)?

The applicant's previous and current cases *that resulted in a prison sentence* will be listed on IDOC's website, and will include the county of conviction, offense, case number, and sentencing information. You can look at that information here:

<https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/Offender/Pages/InmateSearch.aspx>

The Department of Corrections website will not include information about convictions that did not result in a prison sentence in Illinois. Thus, it will not include convictions from other states, or convictions in Illinois that resulted in probation. The applicant should be able to provide you some information about those kinds of convictions.

- For example, the applicant should be able to tell you that they were convicted of a robbery in Milwaukee in 1994. You could then contact the clerk in Milwaukee County to obtain records for that conviction.

If the applicant was convicted in a county outside of Cook County, you may be able to find additional information through this website, which provides access to the clerk systems in many counties outside of Cook County: <https://www.judici.com/>. Unfortunately, Cook County does not provide general public access to this information online.

5. What if the applicant is serving a sentence for multiple cases out of multiple counties?

Please include all current, undischarged sentences in the Offenses of Conviction section.

6. Does the application need to be notarized?

No.

7. How can I find out if the application was received by the Prisoner Review Board?

To check to see if an application was received, you should contact the PRB directly at 217-782-7273, or you can email them at prb.medicalrelease@illinois.gov.

8. What happens to my application once it's been filed?

Once your application is filed with the PRB, the PRB will contact the medical staff of the relevant correctional facility and ask them to complete a brief medical evaluation of the applicant. Their evaluation will simply state if the applicant qualifies for the Joe Coleman Act, and whether they are qualified under the terminally ill or medically incapacitated category. (See specific definitions above.) Usually, these evaluations are based on a review of the applicant's medical records.

If the medical officer certifies that the applicant is eligible, your application will be placed on the PRB's medical release docket, and the applicant (or whoever filed the application) will receive a letter with a docket number and the date of the public hearing, if requested. Registered victims will also be contacted and have 30 days to respond, but their opinion will not stop a case from being considered by the PRB.

If the medical officer writes in their evaluation that the person is **not** eligible for relief under the Joe Coleman Act, the person who filed will receive a letter stating that the application has been denied. You cannot appeal this decision, but you can file a new application.

If the case is proceeding to a hearing, the date that the applicant submits the application will govern when the applicant's public hearing will take place (if requested) and when the application will be considered by the PRB. Hearing dates are not determined very far in advance, but the hearing date will be no later than 90 days from the day you filed the application.

Once the application has been considered by the Prisoner Review Board, either with or without a public hearing, three Prisoner Review Board members will take a vote. An application is granted by a simple majority, meaning you need 2 out of 3 votes for the applicant to be released.

9. Will there be a hearing on the application?

There will be a hearing on the application if (1) you requested one on the PRB application and (2) if the IDOC medical evaluation says that the applicant qualifies for medical release. If you do not request one, or if IDOC says that you do not qualify, then there will be no hearing.

We recommend that you request a public hearing, even if you are not sure about who will speak at the hearing. The hearings are an opportunity to directly address the people who are deciding whether or not the applicant should be released.

10. What will happen at the hearing?

Currently, the PRB is holding medical release hearings virtually over a platform called Webex, which is similar to Zoom. Up to four witnesses may appear on behalf of the applicant at the hearing, including an attorney. Hearings are open to the public, meaning that anyone can watch the hearings online (but not participate) if they register in advance.

Once a hearing date has been set, you can register to attend the hearing through the PRB website: prb.illinois.gov. **Everybody who wants to attend or speak at the hearing must register online, and we recommend you register as far in advance as possible.**

At the hearing, three members of the PRB will consider the case. Up to four witnesses can speak on behalf of the applicant, and victims' representatives and representatives from the State's Attorney's Office can also speak. As of June 2025, the incarcerated person has a right to speak on their own behalf. Then, the PRB will likely ask questions about the applicant's medical condition and their reentry plan. The entire hearing typically lasts less than an hour.

Most hearing dates will have several cases docketed, so those attending may be required to wait and watch other individuals' hearings before their hearing occurs. Hearings can sometimes go into the early afternoon.

All of these hearings can be very emotional, and may include discussions of violence, dehumanizing language, and graphic and upsetting medical information. Be prepared to hear this information both about the case you are registered to attend, as well as other cases. Take steps to take care of yourself before and after the hearing whenever possible.

11. When will I hear if the application is granted?

The PRB is currently voting publicly on the day of the hearing. Applicants and/or their representatives are typically formally notified of the PRB's decision within a few days.

12. What happens if the application is granted?

If the application is granted, the applicant's sentence will be discharged and they will be placed on a term of mandatory supervised release (MSR) for up to five years. After receiving notice that the case has been approved, Field Services, a unit within the Department of the Corrections, will verify the applicant's parole plan. As a loved one, you can try to communicate with Field Services about these arrangements by calling the prison. If the parole plan is approved, the applicant will be released.

If the parole plan is not approved, Field Services will work to identify an acceptable placement, including a nursing home placement.

13. What happens if the application is denied?

If the application is denied, the applicant will not be released. As of January 2024, PRB guidelines state that applicants can file a new application immediately. Previously, the PRB made applicants wait six months before they could reapply, or would require applicants to apply for a waiver of the six-month waiting period.

14. If the applicant has to register as a Sex Offender, are there restrictions on where they can live if they are released?

There are housing restrictions for sex offenders where the victim was a minor. It is unlawful for a child sex offender to reside within 500 feet of a school, playground, or any facility providing programs or services exclusively directed toward people under age 18, unless the person obligated to register owned the property prior to July 7, 2000.

Although there are no formal restrictions on sex offenders living with children under the age of 18, the Department of Corrections is unlikely to approve a parole site where children live. If the applicant is required to register as a sex offender, it is a good idea to identify a parole site where there are no children.

15. Is there anyone or any type of offense NOT eligible to file a medical release application?

No. Anyone serving a sentence for a conviction imposed in Illinois may file a medical release application.

16. Can the Illinois Prison Project review our application before we file or can IPP file on our behalf if we compile everything?

Unfortunately, due to the sheer volume of requests, we cannot review every application prior to filing. IPP hosts a regular drop-in legal clinic via Zoom twice a month, which is an opportunity to ask questions and speak one-on-one with one of our staff attorneys. Our legal clinic is held on the 1st Tuesday of each month from 4 pm - 5 pm and the 3rd Saturday of each month from 9 am - 10 am. Fill out this form to register for the clinic: <https://forms.gle/347QAcmvBy3zTMTn7>

How to Write a Letter of Support for a Medical Release Case

Letters of Support help show that the applicant has family and friends who love and care about

them, and are ready to help the applicant reenter society successfully. In medical release cases, it is especially important that letters of support help outline the reentry plan, including where the person will live, what caretaking will look like, and how the applicant will get to medical appointments.

Who can write a letter of support? It is most important to provide letters of support from anyone who will be housing the applicant, or will be directly involved in helping the applicant to take care of themselves daily and/or get to medical appointments. Family members and friends are encouraged to write letters, as well as important friends of the family, such as your pastor or other religious leaders. Children, especially the applicant's own children, can write letters or draw pictures. Even if they cannot write very much, they can just say how much they miss their parents or family members. Letters from incarcerated people who know the applicant are also helpful, especially if those incarcerated people have witnessed the applicant get sicker or have helped to take care of the applicant. The applicant may have an incarcerated person serving as their official or unofficial aide, or they might receive help from an incarcerated infirmary worker, and these kinds of letters can be very helpful.

In some cases, such as if the applicant has dementia and cannot remember their life story, or if it is challenging to communicate directly with the applicant for any other reason, anyone filing on the applicant's behalf may consider using letters of support from friends and family members as a way to learn more about the applicant and their backstory.

How long should the letter be? People should just say whatever they want to say, and talk about whatever is most important to them. Don't worry about it being too long or too short. Even a very short letter is a good letter!

What are the most important things to say in a letter of support?

1. **Who is the person writing the letter?** They should say their name, profession, if they are retired, or if they are a parent or caretaker.
2. **How do they know the applicant?** Are they related to the applicant? Did the applicant raise them? Did they grow up together with the applicant? How often does the applicant stay in touch with them while incarcerated? Does the applicant write or call them in prison? Can they talk about what the applicant was like before incarceration? What kinds of things did they enjoy doing? Can they write about any challenges the applicant had growing up? Can they discuss if the applicant had a difficult home life? Can they write about the kind of person the applicant is now? Can they talk about the changes in the applicant's life? Can they talk about their knowledge of the applicant's health or what it's been like to watch the applicant's health decline?
3. **How will they help the applicant if released?** This may be the most important section! The letter should talk about how they would help the applicant if they are released. For example, will they house the applicant? What have they done to prepare their home for a terminally ill or disabled person, for example, did they install a wheelchair ramp or order a hospital bed? Will they help make sure the

applicant gets to medical appointments? Will they help make sure the applicant does things like staying sober and attending AA, or connecting them to a church or faith community?

Is there anything they should not say in the letter? Most importantly, everything they say should be true and from the heart. Keep in mind that medical release is NOT like being in court. It is *not* helpful to say that the person is innocent, or that their trial was unfair - even though this may all be true! Do not discuss the facts of the case. Instead, the Prisoner Review Board wants to know that the applicant has friends and family members who care about them and will support them and their ongoing health problems if released.

Can the letter be handwritten? Yes! But please write legibly.

Must the letters include their address? They ideally should include their address as part of verifying their identity.

SAMPLE MEDICAL RELEASE LETTER

[DATE]

Prisoner Review Board
1001 N. Walnut Street
Springfield, IL 62702

Dear Prisoner Review Board,

My name is Esther Good. Amanda Good is my niece. I have known her since she was born. Ever since she was little, she wanted to help others. I remember as a little girl she always tried to help me in the kitchen, even when she was too small to be much help. But I did love the company. We didn't have a lot of money when Amanda was a child, but we made do.

When Amanda was a teenager, she was raped by some older boys. After that, she started having a hard time in school. She would come home from school and I knew she was high. I think she was trying to deal with what happened to her and she didn't know how to do it. She struggled a lot and she lost her way.

Amanda has a family who loves her very much. We are a very close family and we take care of our own. It broke my heart when Amanda was arrested. Since then, I write her letters and call her on the phone about once a week. I put money on her books whenever I can. I cannot believe it has been this many years. She is sorry and we all are. But since she's been in prison, I have seen the change in Amanda. She's gotten sober and that helped a lot. She's thinking clearly now and she wants to help other people in their sobriety.

We were all devastated when Amanda was diagnosed with cancer. Recently, the doctor told her that she only has a few months to live, and it broke my heart when she told me that. I know that she feels a lot of physical pain and that she now has a hard time doing simple things like walking around or dressing herself.

If Amanda is released, she will be staying with my sister, Eden Good, who is Amanda's mother. I used to be over at my sister's house just about every day because Eden and I work together helping people with their taxes. If she is released, I will be helping to care for Amanda. My schedule is flexible, and I will stay with Amanda every morning. I will also help Eden take Amanda to medical appointments, bathe, and dress Amanda. We have already made modifications to Eden's home to make it wheelchair accessible. I want nothing more than to be with her during her final days.

Amanda is a person who has made mistakes, but she is a good person. She is kind and loving. She cares about other people, especially her family. Please grant her medical release so that she can spend her final days with her family.

Sincerely,

Ms. Esther Good
1234 Sample Street
Chicago, IL 60603
(312) 555-5555

Medical Release Application Checklist

Underlying Offense

- ☐ Description of underlying offense, including county and date sentenced

Medical History

- ☐ List current medications
- ☐ List prior medical conditions
- ☐ Describe terminal illness or medical incapacity
- ☐ Attach relevant medical records from IDOC, and from outside hospitals

Parole Plan

- ☐ Place to live
- ☐ If required to register as a sex offender, confirm and note there are no children in the home and that it is more than 500 feet from a school, park, playground, etc.
- ☐ Describe your plan for medical care in the community
- ☐ Describe plan for help with completing activities of daily living, especially if it's a medical incapacitation case
- ☐ Describe your plan for financial support

Institutional Adjustment

- ☐ Highlight classes, certificates, diplomas, and other accomplishments

Personal History

- ☐ Childhood
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Military history
- ☐ Job history (in and out of prison)
- ☐ Marriage/Children

Attachments

- ☐ Letters of Support
- ☐ Medical Records
- ☐ Accomplishments in Prison
- ☐ Disciplinary Cards

Submission

- ☐ Signed by applicant (under penalty of perjury)
- ☐ Request or waive right to a public hearing
- ☐ **Include PRB's medical release application**
- ☐ Emailed, faxed, or mailed to PRB