

COMMUTATION PETITIONS

A Guide for Incarcerated People

Illinois Prison Project, Updated December 2025

Important: Read this entire toolkit before you start writing.

This handbook and accompanying template are intended to be used for the preparation of *pro se* commutation petitions, which means petitions you are filing yourself and without an attorney. These materials are intended to be educational only. While we will try to provide as much information as possible about what we know about clemency generally, we do NOT know the specifics of your situation and the information here does NOT constitute legal advice.

The template will help you to gather the information you need to write a commutation petition and include supporting documents. You should write this petition in your own voice, using “I” and “we”.

You must sign the petition before submitting.

Commutation Petition Checklist

Basic Information

- ☐ Name, date of birth, place of birth, aliases, social security number, marital status ☐ IDOC #, IDOC facility name, address, and telephone number
- ☐ Prior military service, prior clemencies

Underlying Offense

- ☐ Required info (case #, offense, date of arrest, county, conviction type (i.e. bench trial, jury trial, plea), judge, sentence, time served)
- ☐ Description of offense
- ☐ Letter expressing remorse (optional)

Prior Offenses

- ☐ Required info (case number, offense type, county, sentence)
- ☐ Descriptions of offenses or incidents (to best of your ability)

Personal History

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

Institutional Adjustment

- ☐ Highlight classes, certificates, diplomas, and other accomplishments
- ☐ Request/include disciplinary card if advantageous
- ☐ List and briefly explain citations

Medical History – most files include a medical review

- ☐ List current medications
- ☐ List prior and current medical conditions
- ☐ Attach relevant medical records

Parole Plan

- ☐ Place to live
- ☐ If a registered sex offender, note that home has no children and is 500+ feet from a school, park, etc.
- ☐ Describe your plan for medical care in the community if relevant
- ☐ Describe your plan for financial support /employment

Attachments

- ☐ Letters of Support (must include one from person you will live with post-release)
- ☐ Medical Records
- ☐ Disciplinary Cards
- ☐ Accomplishments in Prison
- ☐ Photographs (optional)

Submission

- ☐ Signed by petitioner (under penalty of perjury)
- ☐ Emailed and Mailed to PRB, Court, and State’s Attorney

What to Know Before You Begin

IMPORTANT: Before you begin, make sure that you have a plan for how you will finalize and send the petition. You may choose to use IPP's Commutation Petition Template below to help structure your petition. You will also need to gather additional documentation, such as letters of support, which will be attached to your petition. **The Prisoner Review Board (PRB) requires that all clemency petitions be typed or clearly handwritten. We recommend designating a trusted loved one to help gather needed documents (such as letters of support) and to ensure your petition is properly typed and submitted.** You can find more information on how to submit your petition electronically and via mail below the template.

1. **What is clemency?** Clemency is the power of the Governor to change a criminal conviction or criminal sentence imposed by a court. Commutation is a type of clemency, specifically the modification of a sentence. If someone's sentence is commuted, that means that the sentence is changed, often to "time served" so that the person can be released.
2. **Who reviews and decides on commutation petitions?** Commutation petitions are filed with the Prisoner Review Board (PRB). The PRB makes a confidential recommendation to the Governor. However, the recommendation is not binding. The Governor makes the final decision about all clemency requests. The Governor's authority to grant or deny a commutation petition is limitless, meaning the Governor can commute any sentence at any time, to anything, and for any reason. On the other hand, the Governor can deny any commutation request for any reason, and without explanation. You may find it helpful to remember the saying, "Always hope for the best but prepare for the worst."
3. **Will there be a hearing on the petition?** You have the right to a public hearing. You can request or waive a public hearing. Even if you waive your public hearing, the victim of SA can opt to have a hearing. While incarcerated people cannot attend their own clemency hearings, as of July 2025, clemency applicants will have a virtual pre-hearing conference with one member of the PRB.
4. **Does the petition need to be notarized?** No. As of the time of this toolkit's publication in June 2023, the Prisoner Review Board has suspended the requirement that petitions be notarized. Petitions must be signed by either the incarcerated person seeking relief, or his or her attorney, and must include the following statement: **"I declare under penalty of perjury that all of the assertions made in this petition are complete, truthful and accurate."**
5. **How quickly will the Governor decide?** Normally, the Prisoner Review Board considers petitions on a three-month schedule, meaning that petitions filed by a certain date are scheduled for a public hearing three months after that filing date. For example, if you file by January 23, your hearing might be held in April. The PRB makes a recommendation to the Governor within two months of the hearing. The Governor then grants or denies the petition. The Governor is not bound by any timeline or schedule.
6. **What are they looking for in a commutation petition?** Unlike appeals, commutation petitions are not about winning or losing on legal issues. The goal is to show the PRB and Governor that you have taken responsibility for your mistakes, have been rehabilitated, and that you are ready to re-enter public life. In other words, things that you might bring up in court -- like your lawyer making a mistake, or your belief that a witness lied -- probably do not belong in your petition.

You want to explain the current offense in a factual manner. Unless you plan to pursue an innocence claim, a commutation petition should mostly adhere to the facts agreed to in court. The PRB and Governor want to hear about what happened in your life that led to this point, and want

to understand your explanation for any mistakes you made, or what was going on at the time you caught this case. The petition should focus on who you are today, your rehabilitation, and your relationships with family and friends.

7. **My last petition was denied less than a year ago. Can I still file?** No, unless your petition is an emergency, and you specifically mark your petition as an emergency petition and waive your hearing. According to the Prisoner Review Board's guidelines, the one-year bar may not apply to emergency filings.
8. **I have a commutation petition pending right now and/or a pending case in court. Can I still file?** You cannot file a new petition until one year after denial. However, if you have a pending petition, you can file additional arguments as a supplement to that filing.
9. **Where can my helper or loved one find more information about how to assist in the collection and submission of my petition?** Your helper or loved one can find a longer version of this handbook at: illinoisprisonproject.org. He or she can also access updates on our Facebook page by following Illinois Prison Project on Facebook.
10. **How do I get medical and/or mental health records from the Illinois Department of Corrections?** You are entitled to a copy of your medical records in general, and from the Department of Corrections. The fastest way to get your records to someone on the outside (like a helper) is to request them directly and then mail them to your helper. You will likely get your records quickly if you only request your current "Problem List" and current medications, both of which you can obtain from Medical Records.

How to use the below template: You or a helper/loved one will need to re-write the below information into your own document and in your own words. We recommend using the headings below (they are underlined and in bold type). We have put an asterisk (*) symbol next to the required sections that you must include in your petition. The text underneath each heading is IPP's descriptions and recommendations, and should be replaced by your own words. We have also included some sample language that you should feel free to adapt.

**PETITION FOR
EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY RELIEF: COMMUTATION OF SENTENCE IN THE
MATTER OF [FIRST AND LAST NAME, IDOC #]**

"This Petition for Clemency is submitted to the Prisoner Review Board and the Illinois Governor's Office by [First Last], [IDOC #], who is housed at [INSTITUTION] Correctional Center. I [DO/DO NOT] request a public hearing in this matter. I respectfully request that the Prisoner Review Board and Governor Pritzker process this request and grant relief in the form of commutation to time served."

1. Personal Information* [The PRB requires that all clemency petitions include the following information. If not applicable to you, write "N/A."]

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| - Name: | - Telephone: (of the institution) | - Aliases: |
| - Facility: | - Date of Birth | - Prior Military Service |
| - IDOC: | - Place of Birth | - Prior Clemencies: [month/date of prior consideration] |
| - Address: (of the institution) | | |

- Social Security Number

- Marital Status:

2. Conviction at Issue*

Offense:

Date of Arrest:

Conviction Type: [jury trial,

Case Number:

County of Conviction:

bench trial, plea]

Sentencing Judge:

Sentence:

Time Served:

Account of the Offense*

This section should provide a description of the offense. You should describe the offense as objectively as possible. It may be helpful to describe the State's case against you as well as your own version of events. This should include the dates, places, who was involved, whether there were weapons, if anyone was injured, and all surrounding circumstances. **Unless you have a very compelling innocence claim, most attorneys recommend that a person filing for a commutation petition both accept responsibility for the offense and express remorse. The goal of the clemency petition is for you to gain release, not to challenge your conviction.** Please use active language ("I murdered Ms. Decedent") as opposed to passive language ("Ms. Decedent was killed."). If you confessed, pleaded guilty, waived an appeal, or did anything consistent with remorse, please highlight that here.

If you intend to legally pursue an innocence claim and are maintaining your innocence (**this only applies to a small number of people**), you may want to use the following language: "I have always maintained my innocence in the present offense. [Provide your version of the offense]. The State's case against me was that [Provide the state's version of events]. Even accepting the State's version of events, commutation is appropriate in my case. Although I did not commit the crime for which I was convicted, I take full responsibility for the [show ownership of the mistakes or missteps in your life here] and I have changed because of [describe your efforts towards rehabilitation, recovery, or other changes in your life]."

3. Other Cases for Which Clemency is Not Sought* The PRB has access to your arrest record on their own, and will likely look it up when reviewing your petition. However, you should also try to include a list of prior offenses in your petition. For every case in which you were arrested in the past, except traffic cases, provide the following information:

- Case Number (helpful but not required):
- Offense of Conviction:
- County:
- Sentence:
- The disposition (meaning what happened in the case, such as whether the case was dismissed or you were convicted; and if convicted, what sentence you served)
- What happened in the cases where you were convicted (your brief version of events—two to three sentences is sufficient)

If you do not have this information available, or cannot easily request it, just include what you can remember (you can include a line saying that your records are unavailable right now, but that this is what happened to the best of your recollection)

4. Personal History* This information should be written out like a story. The more details you can include about your life before incarceration, the better. Below are some questions that are meant to get you started. You are not required to answer each one. You should write in first person (use "I" and "me").

Childhood, Education, and Work History* Please provide a brief description of your life prior to the offense. The goal here is to give the PRB and the Governor a sense of the person that you are, your relationship with family and friends, and your life prior to this offense. For some people, this history will be a traumatic one; for others, their childhoods and lives generally were not traumatic prior to some triggering event. Either way, strive to show the reader who you were, the circumstances of your upbringing, and the obstacles or strengths that helped shape you. Pictures, certificates, and other visual materials might be useful here.

- **Childhood**
 - What was your childhood like? Was there enough food and money for the family to be comfortable, or were basic necessities a struggle? Did you grow up in a neighborhood where you felt unsafe, whether from violence, drugs, or trouble at home? Were you ever abused—physically, verbally, or sexually—as a child, or did you witness that abuse of someone else? Did you become a parent at a young age (before 18)? When did you leave home? Why? Were you homeless as a child or teenager?
- **Educational history** (The PRB requires that you include as many of the names of schools as you can remember. You can include this information throughout this section.)
 - Where did you go to school? Did you excel academically, or struggle in school? Were you in special classes, or did you have a learning disability? How far did you get in school? If you did not graduate high school, why not? Did you play sports, participate in clubs, or any other extra-curricular activities as a child?
- **Employment history** (The PRB requires that you include as many of the jobs that you have held that you can remember.)
 - Where did you work, and for how long? Include as much information as you can about each position, including title and pay rate. Please note if you particularly enjoyed or excelled at any position. Did you earn any certifications or licenses?
- **Hardships and violence as an adult:**
 - Did you experience hardships as an adult? For example, did you experience any abuse in your relationships, such as being beaten up by a partner or spouse? Were you the victim of violence outside of the home, such as community violence or gang violence? Were you ever the victim of violence against you because of who you are (for example, because of your sexual orientation)? Were you in any serious accidents that caused serious, permanent, or life-threatening injuries?

Finally, discuss any factors or history that may be considered explaining (but not excusing) your offense. For example, you may have suffered physical or emotional abuse, dealt with undiagnosed mental illness, or struggled with addiction. If this was the case for you, please explain that history here. You can share what substances you struggled with, what was happening in your life when you first started using drugs or alcohol, what age you began using, who introduced you to it, and how addiction affected your life or influenced your poor decisions. This information is offered to help the reader understand your conduct, not to excuse it.

Military History For some, military service is a significant source of trauma. Please provide a description of your military history. Include service dates, ranks, and discharge dates. Highlight any accomplishments or injuries suffered during service. If you suffered PTSD or other emotional trauma as a result of service, please discuss that here. Please discuss any treatment you received from the VA, and explicitly note if you received no treatment. Similarly, if you suffered a physical injury due to your service, please discuss that injury in detail here. Include whether you were discharged honorably. If you qualify for VA benefits, include that information.

Rehabilitation: You Today*

This is the meat of the petition, and **you should spend the most time and space on this section**. The idea is to give the Governor a robust view of what you have done during the time you were in prison to rehabilitate yourself. Rehabilitation looks different for everyone; some people become artists, some find religion, some become paralegals, some work and work to send money home. Some have spent years taming mental illness or

addiction, or battling physical ailments. Some mentor other people in prison, some become writers or reconnect with family members -- how have you spent your time, and how have you changed?

This section has the fewest rules, because the way this looks will really depend on your strengths, interests, and accomplishments. Do whatever you can to creatively convey the remarkable person you have become. If possible and appropriate, include a section about your remorse for your offense.

Physical Health and Care

Describe your physical ailments to help illustrate the way age and/or physical condition affects your life now. Note each of your diagnoses and current medications. Include information about any health condition you currently have (asthma, heart/lung disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, immune disorder, cancer, kidney failure, liver disease, etc.) The idea is to paint a vivid picture of your illnesses. For example, you could say “I have so much pain in my hands that I cannot reliably hold a pen,” if you have arthritis. If in doubt, include more health-related information than less.

Mental Health Care

You may have suffered from mental illnesses, such as PTSD, bipolar disorder, or addiction, and a diagnosed mental illness may help explain (but not excuse) your conduct in the instant offense. Please discuss any steps that you have taken to address any underlying mental illness. Please include any treatment plan and prognosis.

If you were convicted of a sex offense, please describe every single treatment program in which you participated. Note that there are not enough sex offender treatment programs in IDOC, and that preference generally goes to people with shorter sentences, so it is entirely possible that you have not yet received adequate treatment. Nonetheless, please describe any efforts you have taken to pursue alternative therapies, group work, or efforts you have made to join treatment programs (even if unsuccessful).

5. Reasons for Clemency* This section should explain the reasons that you no longer pose a threat to society, and why you should be released. You may repeat some of the information that you shared above (especially in the rehabilitation section) but this section focuses on the future. The goal is to provide the reasons why you should receive clemency. For example:

- **Health and Age.** You can argue that based on your age or underlying medical condition, you no longer pose a threat to society.
- **Rehabilitation.** You can argue that commutation is appropriate because of your history of rehabilitation while in custody. To support this argument, you should include information that demonstrates your rehabilitation, including certificates of accomplishments, job history, transcripts, diplomas, letters of support or recommendation from staff or inmates.
- **Family Connections.** It is important to emphasize community support for two reasons: first, it assures the PRB and Governor that you have the emotional resources you need to succeed in the community. Second, providing proof of community support and family connections helps the PRB and Governor’s Office see you as a person, not a piece of paper. You can argue that you have family members who depend on you, such as children who are missing their parent, or elderly family members who need your help. You can also argue that your family is ready and able to support you when you get out.

6. Type of Relief Requested: Commutation of Sentence* Commutation is a change in sentence. Although the Governor can commute a sentence in any way, here, you should state that he or she seeks a commutation to “time served.” If your sentence is commuted to time served, you will likely be placed on Mandatory Supervised Release for a period of time. You may wish to seek an alternative form of relief, such as a full pardon, or a commutation to a specific number of years of incarceration.

If you are requesting a commutation to time served, you can use this language: “After over [number of years] years in the Department of Corrections, and in light of my transformation while in prison, release is appropriate.

Updated: December 2025 ↔ 53 W. Jackson Blvd #452 Chicago, IL 60605 ↔ 312-767-5773

For the reasons detailed above, I respectfully request the Governor commute my sentence.”

7. Parole Plan* You **must** include a parole plan for the best chances of success. That means spelling out exactly where you plan to live and with whom (i.e. name, relationship, and address). **The person who will house you should confirm this and provide their address in a letter of support.** Consider including the following information in this section: Will you have your own room? Will someone provide financial support while you get back on your feet? If you have a medical condition, how will you be taken care of if released? The purpose of this section is to show that you will be well-supported if you are released and will not go back to jail or prison because you need money or housing.

8. Supporting Materials:* Although every petition is different, there are certain documents that you might want to consider including as attachments. List attachments here, including letters of support, certificates of accomplishments, medical records, and other documents:

- **Medical Records.** If you have a medical condition that you want to discuss in your petition, include medical records that articulate that condition. **Do not** include hundreds (or even dozens) of pages of records. Anything that spells out the condition, and reflects your current health and medications, is enough.
- **Letters of Support.** Letters of support from people in the community are very important, and you should include as many as you can. A template is included at the end of this petition.
- **Disciplinary Card.** You can obtain your disciplinary card from your counselor (this is a relatively new policy). Only include your disciplinary card if it will benefit you, for instance if you only have minor infractions, or if you haven’t received a ticket in a long time. If you do have a lot of tickets, consider acknowledging that fact and explaining the reason, such as a period of anger and acting out. Do not make excuses for all tickets; take responsibility where you can and explain how you have changed and matured over time.
- **Accomplishments.** If you have completed any courses, educational programs, degrees, or group classes while incarcerated, you should include that documentation, such as certificates, letters from a pastor or supervisor, or any other documentation that reflects your rehabilitation.
- **Photographs.** You might include photographs of yourself with family or friends.
- **Military Records.** If you served in the military, include your DD214.
- **Court Documents.** Court documents are not required. You may want to include court documents if the facts of your case are sympathetic (i.e., you were convicted on accountability, or no one was hurt, or an “armed” offense involved a knife or a gun that was never discharged). Court orders can be obtained from the circuit clerk’s office in the county of conviction.

I declare under penalty of perjury that all of the assertions made in this petition are complete, truthful and accurate. [This statement **must** be included at the end of the petition.]

Signed

Date

How to Submit the Petition

We recommend that petitions be submitted **both by mail and by email (if a loved one can send it for you)**, to ensure the quickest consideration. Ask a trusted loved one to be your designated helper, who you can mail your materials to for them to copy, compile, and mail off. They can also submit the petition by email on your behalf. The petition does not have to be typed, but if possible, it should be to ensure that it is readable.

- To file by mail:
 - You will need three copies of the entire, signed petition (meaning what you wrote/typed up, with all of the documentation and **your signature**). Petitions should be stapled or clipped together so that they can

Updated: December 2025 ↔ 53 W. Jackson Blvd #452 Chicago, IL 60605 ↔ 312-767-5773

easily be separated. Do not bind them or submit them in plastic sleeve sheets.

- Send a copy to the sentencing judge or the chief judge of the circuit, if the sentencing judge is no longer on the bench. You can ask a loved one to help you find information about chief judges of each circuit court can be found at the appendix at the end of this toolkit.
- Send a copy to the current State's Attorney of the county of conviction. If you have multiple active sentences/cases in multiple counties, send a copy to the State's Attorney of each county.
- Send a copy of the petition plus **proof of mailing** (registered or certified mail receipt included in the package) to the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, 1001 N. Walnut Street Springfield, IL 62702.
- To file by email (you may have someone email the petition on your behalf):
 - Send a **pdf copy** of the petition (with the petition and all supporting documentation consolidated into one pdf) to prb.clemency@illinois.gov In that same email, CC the State's Attorney for the county of conviction. To determine which email address to use, please call the State's Attorney for the county where you were convicted. For Cook County the email address is clemencyandparole-statesattorney@cookcounty.onmicrosoft.com.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What happens if the petition is granted?** If the petition is granted, the Governor's Office will direct the PRB to prepare a commutation order, which will be sent directly to the Department of Corrections. Someone in the institution will tell you that your sentence has been commuted, and Field Services will begin working with you to verify your release plan.
2. **What happens if the petition is denied?** If the petition is denied, you will receive a letter from the Governor's Office. You may refile in one year from the date of the denial.
3. **If I have to register as a Sex Offender, are there restrictions on where I can live if released?** There are. 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 they 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 you are required to register as a sex offender, it is a good idea to identify a parole site where there are no children.
4. **Can IPP review my petition before I file or can IPP submit my petition?** Unfortunately, due to the sheer volume of requests, we cannot review any petition prior to filing. We also cannot file on your behalf.

How to Write a Letter of Support for a Clemency Case

Letters of Support help show that you have family and friends who love and care about you and who are ready to help you reenter society successfully, such as by providing housing or help finding a job.

Who can write a letter of support? Family members and friends are the best people to write letters, including important friends of the family, such as your pastor or other religious leaders. Children, especially your own children, can write letters or draw pictures. Even if they cannot write very much, they can just say how much they miss you.

How long should the letter be? People should just say whatever they want, and talk about whatever is most important to them. Don't worry about it being too long or 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 you?** Are they related to you? Did you raise them? Did you grow up together? How often do you stay in touch with them during your incarceration? Do you write or call them in prison? Can they talk about what you were like before incarceration? What kinds of things did you enjoy doing? Can they write about any challenges you had growing up? Can they discuss if you had a difficult home life? Can they write about the kind of person you are now? Can they talk about the changes in your life?
3. **How will they help you if you are released?** This may be the most important section! They should talk about how they would help you if you are released. For example, will you live with them? Will they help make sure you get to medical appointments? Will they help make sure you stay sober and attend AA? Will they help you find a job?

Is there anything they should not say in the letter? Most importantly, everything they say should be true and from the heart. Also, filing a clemency petition is NOT like being in court. It is **not** helpful to say that the person is innocent. Do not discuss the facts of the case. Instead, the Governor wants to know that they have friends and family who care about them and who will be able to support them if released.

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

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

TEMPLATE FOR CLEMENCY LETTER OF SUPPORT:

Governor J. B. Pritzker
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706
[DATE]

Dear Governor Pritzker,

I am... (Explain who you are. your, name, job title, organization, location, and relationship to John Doe.)

I have known John Doe. (Explain how long you have known John Doe; talk about how well you know him, some examples of the activities or interactions you have had with him).

In my opinion, John Doe is....(Give your opinion of John Doe such as work performance, civic activities, attitude and goals, and anything you want the Governor to know. You may want to mention his nature, his learning ability, willingness to learn/work, his trustworthiness, and so on. Has he undertaken efforts at self-improvement? Please use specific examples. If you know of instances where John Doe particularly stood out, mention them. Sound sincere, and be as descriptive as possible, using adjectives and adverbs.)

Support (describe any support you are able to provide John Doe, including employment, financial, or emotional support. If John Doe can live at your home while he transitions back to the community, please identify the neighborhood in which you live, how big your residence is, who else lives in the home (i.e. "my children, 8 and 10,"), and confirm that John Doe will be able to have a bedroom for as long as he needs).

[Sign and scan signed letter]

NAME

Address (full address)