

Parole Hearing

This was my first time attending a Parole Hearing, in fact it was my first time being anywhere close to a prison or correctional facility. I can definitely say it was a great learning experience that opened my mind to something new. I originally expected or thought that this parole hearing was the place where the decisions were made regarding the future of the inmates, but instead it is the first step of the process. I also expected the room where they take place to be bigger and to see more people, but it was quite the opposite; at first it was only my friend and I at the hearings, but in some cases family or friends were allowed to attend the hearing, and are given the option to provide a testimony about the case if they choose to. And there are two guards present as well to control the situation and bring in and out each inmate who is to appear.

The date I attended the parole hearings was February 24th at around 12:00pm

The parole hearings can be a complicated matter because the member of the board who evaluates the case has to be very objective with the case and take into account a lot of different variables. I personally had a hard time not feeling biased because from the three hearings I witnessed, each inmate had a big problem with drug abuse, or they were under the influence of a drug when they committed the crime which makes very hard to take them seriously, or even feel compassionate towards them. Nonetheless the presiding board member does a good job at trying to get the story and facts straight and tries to give them a fair recommendation that would go up to the rest of the board members. One of the interesting things I learned about the process is that an inmate's opportunity to receive a parole hearing depends on the severity of the charges. Typically within two to three months an average inmate gets its opportunity, but as I talked to one of the security guards, he informed me that for example a man accused of murder has his scheduled until 2034. And usually after the hearing takes place the inmate is informed that within two weeks they will receive a notification of the decision made. Before the parole hearing starts, the inmates are given a packet to review before hand, they are asked swear an oath and then they proceed to recount their story and/or give clarifications of what really happened. One of the main purposes of the hearing is to review why the inmate is back in prison, then to assess the issue, and lastly to consider the propensity of the inmate to relapse. One of the things I noticed was that I couldn't look at the inmates as they were leaving, I rather chose to look away. I don't know why I reacted that way it just happened.

One of the interesting things I learned from this visit to the Correctional facility is that the board that processes the decisions is composed of five members who are chosen by the governor of the state of Utah and then the Senate approves the nominations; the people chosen serve for a period of about 5 years. With the process of the parole hearing there are two possible resolutions: parole or termination. Depending on the offense or charges, the sentence follows certain guidelines. I thought it was an interesting that they are referred to as guidelines, but it makes sense because depending on the behavior or conduct of the inmate, the sentence can be shortened or prolonged as the prison deems necessary. At first I wasn't sure why the jail would bother with the idea of even granting paroles, but as we talked to Mrs. Jennifer Baritel she explained that they considered paroles as an alternative to reduce the costs of housing or maintaining the prisoners, because the prison has to maintain a budget; and secondly as a way to manage the number of people in prison, in order to prevent overcrowding and so forth. Those

two reasons made sense and provide a sustainable system. This system also insures that there is a minimal impact to the local community.

The first case was from a lady named Mrs. Romo, who was accused of a third degree felony. She went into a Walt-mart and stole a considerable amount of merchandise and was later caught at the cash register. She was given an 18 month sentence, but was informed that she could be held longer. Mrs. Romo claims to have been under black out state while she stole the articles, and claims to not remember much or even anything from the incident. She is known to have some medical condition, and that was taken into consideration because there is the possibility that her medications cause the claimed black out state. She was in a tough financial condition at the time, and her bishop was paying a hotel room for her. Mrs. Romo is asking for parole, and being put under supervision. The advantage she has is she has a husband that could help her with the supervision part of it. No one was present at her hearing.

The second case was Mrs. Mary Jane Malone. She was charged with escaping from custody, aggravated assault, 3rd degree felony. Her sentence is set for thirty eight months. She pleaded guilty of the escape but denied the aggravated assault. Mrs. Malone was in an ankle monitor when she and her friend got pulled over by a cop; Mrs. Malone then proceeded to run away from the cop and broke the ankle monitor. She claimed to have being high at the time of the escape. What was interesting about this case is that she is finally starting to change her behavior, and is actually taking seriously the classes offered at the prison for self improvement. Women take a course name Ex-cel which teaches them how to get of drugs and basic life skills so they can cope with society once they are back. Granted at age 41 is about time she realizes that she must changed her course in life. Sadly enough her 18yr old son in currently in prison. Mrs. Malone asked for termination instead of parole, which surprised me, but makes sense if she really is trying to put her life back together. One friend of her was present at the hearing.

The third case was Mrs. Kimberly Bailey. She was charged with possession of a controlled substance and also with identity theft. She was caught with a baggy of methamphetamine and also some muscle relaxers. When she was caught she used and provided her information as her sister, and even used her sister's drivers license. In this hearing her family was present, but the sister declined providing a witness against her. Her sentence is 16 months. What was interesting about this case was that this girl showed no remorse whatsoever and seemed rather amused by the charges pressed against her. She did not have concrete plans or details of how she was going to improve herself. She seemed very careless. Her family asked for parole, but Mrs. Bailey said she would rather have termination cause she says she knows she will brake parole. Then her mother proceeded to lecture her before she left.