

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General Steve Marshall Issues Statement in Support of Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Steve Marshall issued the following statement today in support of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, while voicing opposition to a parole reform bill that will be before the Alabama House of Representatives on Tuesday:

In my tenure as Attorney General, I have pushed only two pieces of legislation. The first, enacted in 2017, streamlined the appeals process for those on death row. The second, enacted in 2019, reformed our broken parole system.

Since the 2019 reforms were implemented, the Board of Pardons and Paroles has been condemned by the media and by members of the Legislature for doing what the Board is there to do: deny parole to those who present a threat to public safety. At times, the attacks have been unnecessarily personal.

You cannot have a legitimate debate about parole rates without understanding that 80 percent of Alabama’s prison population are violent criminals. Since 2015, near-annual changes to our sentencing and incarceration laws have ensured that dangerous offenders are largely the only ones left behind bars. As a result, we should absolutely expect and demand that parole rates decline.

Every inmate in the custody of the Alabama Department of Corrections was sentenced by a judge to a term of incarceration, but today, a sentence is hardly more than a suggestion. Between good time, mandatory early release, education incentive time and the like, there is essentially nothing left to whittle away. Perhaps that is why the anti-incarceration crowd has set its sights on the Board of Pardons and Paroles – there is nobody else to “blame” for our prison rates, least of all the criminals themselves.

Tomorrow, the Alabama House of Representatives will debate House Bill 57 that would create a new council to “oversee” the development and implementation of various guidelines and risk assessments that the Board would be mandated to use in its decision making. This bill is highly problematic in that it would undermine the Board’s independence – a hard-fought victory of the 2019 reforms – and make it more difficult for the Board to deny parole. I strongly oppose this effort.

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While there is room for debate on matters of criminal justice, these debates must include the perspective of law enforcement, prosecutors, and victims of crime. Our state's violent crime rates are an undeniable scourge on many of our biggest cities and their suburbs. And, around the country, we have seen what happens when politicians fail to appreciate the practical consequences of progressive criminal justice policies. We should not continue to entertain such proposals here in Alabama.