TRANSFORMATIONAL PRISON PROJECT

a project of Tides Center

POLICY BRIEF

Ending Lifetime Parole for Transformational Youth: Policy Proposal for the Passage of H.2051/S.1087

PREPARED BY THE TRANSFORMATIONAL PRISON PROJECT (TPP)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Bill H.2051/S.1087 proposes a critical reform to Massachusetts's parole system by ending lifetime parole for **"Transformational Youth" (TYs)**: individuals convicted of loss-of-life offenses between ages 14 and 21 who have served 15+ years in prison (often 30+ years) and are law-abiding for three years on parole. This legislation creates a **dignified path to full reintegration**, **reduces taxpayer burden**, and **enhances public safety** by shifting focus from perpetual surveillance to opportunity and healing.

TYs are among the **least likely to reoffend**: A 2024 Journal of Research on Adolescence study found a 5.2% recidivism rate for individuals formerly sentenced to juvenile life without parole, compared to 44% for general state prisoners in their first year of release. Lifetime parole impedes social and economic reentry and perpetuates poverty, community harm, and systemic inequities.

Kentel Weaver

TPP Youth Development & Reentry Coordinator on Lifetime Parole

*"When I think about being on **parole for the rest of my life**, I think about the American dream of buying a house, with a white picket fence and it being foreclosed on me because I'm re-incarcerated for some minor offense. I think about my future children and how seeing their father going in and out of prison for minor parole violations would affect their upbringing. Why then, would I want to be a father? **I want to own a home, get married, have children, and give back to my community, but a lifetime on parole is still a life sentence.**"*

Policy Context and Legal Foundations

Bill H.2051/S.1087 builds on constitutional protections affirmed in four landmark decisions:

Miller v. Alabama
567 U.S. 460, 2012

Held that mandatory life without parole (LWOP) for juveniles violates the Eighth Amendment.

Diatchenko I
1 N.E.3d 270, Mass. 2013

Extended Miller under Article 26 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, banning even discretionary LWOP for youth.

Diatchenko II
27 N.E.3d 349, Mass. 2015

Required procedural safeguards for youth parole hearings, including the right to counsel, expert funding, and judicial review.

Commonwealth v. Mattis
482 Mass. 823, 2020

Extended youth sentencing protections to people up to age 21, citing neuroscience that 18–20-year-olds are developmentally similar to adolescents, and requiring parole eligibility for life sentences in this age group.

Lifetime parole remains a punitive extension of incarceration already ruled unconstitutional under Miller and Diatchenko. Lifetime parole functions as a shadow sentence; an indefinite form of punishment that outlasts incarceration, often for decades after the person has demonstrated rehabilitation.

This bill offers a humane, constitutional, and evidence-based solution to close this loophole.

Key Provisions of H.2051/S.1087

Eligibility Criteria

This bill applies to individuals convicted between ages 14–21 who:

- Were convicted of first- or second-degree murder or manslaughter under Ch. 265, §§1–2 or §13, or felony-murder statutes under §§102–102C of Ch. 266;
- Served **15+ years in prison**;
- Completed **3 years on parole without violations of law**.

Mandatory Termination of Sentence

This bill reads that:

*"After a transformational youth has lived on parole for **3 years without committing an act that constitutes a felony or misdemeanor violating the law**, the parole board shall issue a certificate of **termination of sentence**... within 30 days of the end of said 3 years on parole."*

Retroactive Application

This bill applies to:

All individuals currently on parole in Massachussets who meet the eligibility criteria.

Administrative Efficiency

This bill reduces the parole caseload:

By removing long-term, low-risk cases from supervision, this bill allows the Board to **direct time and energy toward individuals who need support in higher-risk reentry**.

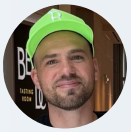
In 2022 alone, the Mass Parole Board conducted close to 3,000 hearings (MA Parole Board, 2022a)

Definition of "TY" or Transformational Youth

This bill defines a TY as:

A person convicted between the ages of 14 and 21 of homicide and sentenced to life in prison.

"We're trying to transform the terminology to Transformational Youth because we are no longer offenders and we are no longer delinquents. We have transformed."



Bobby Lacoviello
TPP Director of Community Outreach

Public Safety: Evidence Against Lifetime Parole

TYs are Among the Least Likely to Reoffend

- A 2024 Journal of Research on Adolescence study found a **5.2% recidivism rate** among those formerly sentenced to LWOP as juveniles, compared to 44% for the general prison population within the first year (Sbeglia et al., 2024).
- In Philadelphia, **only 1% of 269 those who received life sentences as juveniles reoffended** (Daftary-Kapur & Zottoli, 2020).
- Neuroscience studies show that youth overwhelmingly **age out of crime by age 21** (Steinberg, 2014).

Parole Violations are Overwhelmingly Technical, not Criminal

- In MA, **79% of revocations were for technical, non-criminal parole violations** (MA Parole Board, 2022a)
- Nationally, almost **half of prison admissions result from parole or probation violations** rather than criminal offenses. In 20 states, roughly **50% of these can be attributed to technical violations** (Walz & Parson, 2019).
- MA **parole technical violations that can result in re-incarceration** can include **missing a parole officer meeting, not following proper parole reporting** procedures**, possession of a pocket knife, missing a curfew, getting laid off** without immediately securing a new job, **associating with those with criminal records,** or **being in a restricted location** (MA Parole Board, 2022b)

Restorative Justice, Not Punitive Parole, Reduces Crime

- Participation in **restorative justice processes reduces recidivism and strengthens community** bonds (Pavlacic, Kellum, & Schulenberg, 2021; Park University, 2024).

Inhibiting Successful Reentry is a Public Safety Threat

- Lifetime parole restricts association with formerly incarcerated peers, **blocking access to healing, mentorship, and reentry support** (Wang, 2023).
- Lifetime parole creates structural barriers to reintegration, making it **harder for returning citizens to access employment, housing, or community-based support.**

These restrictions undermine public safety *by increasing isolation and destabilization, key drivers of recidivism. By ending lifetime parole, this bill removes these barriers and* ***enables community reintegration.***

Following California's Lead on Juvenile Justice Reform

History

- California passed their **"Youth Offender Parole Bill" (SB 260) in 2013** which mandated re-sentencing hearings from those serving life sentences for crimes committed as teenagers (under age 18 but sentenced as adults) after they'd served 15, 20, or 25 years of their sentence.
- The eligibility criteria was **expanded in 2016** with **SB 261** to include **youth under age 23** at the time of their offense.
- In **2020 SB 118** was passed **ending lifetime parole** for those released after life sentences by **capping parole at three years.**
- These bills were influenced by overcrowding, psychological childhood development neuroscience, and the 2005 Roper v. Simmons Supreme Court Decision that made it unconstitutional to execute anyone who committed their offense under age 18.

Results

- According to the California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) 2023 Human Rights Watch report, of the 125 releases of those on Life without Parole tracked between 2011-2019, only 4 people **(3.2%) were re-convicted of a crime** after three years.
  - These were non-violent offenses unrelated to the original crime.
  - For reference, 24% of all Americans have been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor (Sawyer & Wagner, 2025).
- When looking more narrowly at **only the release of youth offenders**, a University of Oregon professor specifically reviewed 465 California parole hearings for SB260-eligible juvenile offenders from between January 1, 2014 to June 5, 2015 and found that, as of July 2017, none of these youth offenders released on SB 260 returned to prison - **a 0% recidivism rate** (Bell, 2019).

Government Spending: Lifetime Parole is Wasteful

Supervising low-risk parolees drains resources

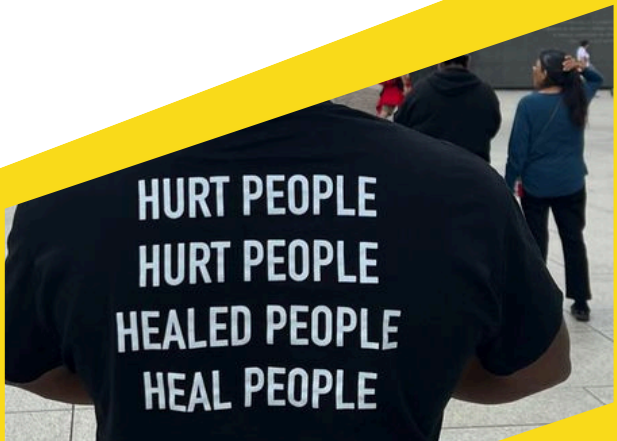
- Cost of s**upervising one parolee in MA: $6,800/year** (Prisoners' Legal Services, 2013).
- With **140 TYs currently on parole** in MA who would be eligible to have their parole terminated immediately under this bill, **Year 1 savings is estimated at $952K**; **10-year projection exceeds $9 million**.
- Supervising low-risk individuals limits capacity to focus on higher-risk individuals on parole.

National data confirms unnecessary cost

- **Technical violations cost taxpayers $2.8 billion/year** (Walz & Parson, 2019).
- In 2019, New York spent **$680 million re-incarcerating people for non-criminal technical violations.** (Prashar, 2021)
- Kansas changed its parole policy in 2007 and **reduced revocations by 48%, saved $34 million** and is anticipated to save another **$80 million over the next few years**. (Baldwin, 2010)

Funds saved could be reallocated to

- **Youth violence prevention**
- **Reentry housing and employment support**
- **Community-based healing programs**



Community and Economic Development

Strengthening community bonds reduces violence

- **Social connectedness** is a key **predictor of reduced violent crime among youth** (Pavlacic, Kellum, & Schulenberg, 2021; Oxford Research Encyclopedia, 2020).
- **Youth who are diverted from the justice system,** particularly through community-based or restorative justice programs, are **significantly less likely to recidivate** and more likely to succeed in education and employment **than those given punitive interventions** (Mendel, 2024).
- **45% of Americans have had an incarcerated loved one** (Wang, 2023). Reuniting families strengthens communities.

Ending parole boosts economic participation

- In California, **90% of individuals released from LWOP are employed**;
- **56% work over 40 hours/week**.
- **40% hold multiple jobs** (Leavell, 2023).
- **84% financially support others** (Leavell, 2023).

Parole limits economic integration

- In MA, standard parole conditions require individuals to **report regularly to a parole officer**, seek approval for residence or employment changes, and obtain permission to leave the state. Those on parole are **prohibited from leaving the country**, **using drugs**, or **possessing weapons**, and must **submit to random drug/alcohol testing and warrantless searches**. They are typically required to work or attend school full-time, avoid contact with criminal associates, and may also face **curfews, no-contact orders, or GPS monitoring**. (MA Parole Board, 2022b)
- **Employment restrictions, travel limitations, and stigma from being visibly on parole** (ie warrantless searches, wearing a GPS monitor) **can reduce access to stable jobs and housing**.
- Individuals with criminal records face **44,000+ civil restrictions after release** (Lake, 2020), reinforcing cycles of poverty.
- According to the National Institute of Justice, these **barriers include serving on a jury, holding public office, securing employment, obtaining housing, receiving public assistance, getting a driver's license, qualifying for college admission or financial aid, military service, and noncitizen deportation** (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2019).

Policy Recommendations

Massachusetts has already recognized that **youth are less culpable and more capable of change**, through Diatchenko I & II and Miller. Now, we must recognize that **lifelong surveillance contradicts that recognition**.

We recommend passage of H.2051/S.1087, which would:

- **End lifetime parole for TYs after 3 years of offense-free supervision**.
- Prioritize public safety by **reallocating supervision resources**.
- **Restore community ties**, **promote economic reintegration**, and **honor human dignity**.
- Implementation is straightforward: The bill includes clear eligibility criteria, automatic issuance timelines, and limits on discretionary denials, minimizing administrative burden.

Call to Action

We urge legislators to **co-sponsor and pass H.2051/S.1087** to **end lifetime parole for youth** who have **served their time**, **demonstrated transformation**, and deserve **a real second chance.**

Endorsements

Lead Co-Sponsors

Representative Christopher Worrell

Senator Jamie Eldridge

Representative Brandy Fluker-Reid

> *"This bill **holds responsible parties accountable** for their actions, but it doesn't destroy the possibility of a future outside the carceral system; **to ensure that those who have proven their rehabilitation aren't permanently trapped by the mistakes of their youth.**" - Representative Worrell*

Current Co-Sponsors

- Rep. Christine Barber
- Sen. Joanne Commerford
- Rep. Leigh Davis
- Rep. Carmine Gentile
- Rep. Natalie Higgins
- Rep. Russell Holmes
- Sen. Patricia Jehlen
- Rep. David LeBoeuf
- Sen. Jason Lewis
- Sen. Liz Miranda
- Rep. Paul McMurtry
- Rep. Samantha Montano
- Rep. John Francis Moran
- Sen. Pavel Payano
- Rep. Lindsey Sabadosa
- Rep. Danillo Sena
- Rep. Priscilla Sousa
- Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven
- Rep. Andre Vargas
- Rep. Bud Williams

FAQ

Does this bill make it easier for violent offenders to go free?	**No**. It **applies only to people already granted parole** and who have remained **law-abiding for three years**, often after decades in prison. These individuals are **already living peacefully in the community**. It also only applies to a very narrow population.
Why 3 years?	Research shows most parole violations occur in the first year. **After 3 years of success, the likelihood of reoffending is extremely low.**
Why not allow the parole board to decide case-by-case?	The parole board already decided: **every eligible person under this bill must be granted parole**. This bill simply **limits endless supervision for those who've proven their transformation**.
Won't this be difficult to implement?	**No**. The bill has **clear criteria and automatic timelines.** It **reduces administrative burden** rather than adding to it.
Can we really trust these individuals to remain law-abiding?	**Yes**. The evidence is overwhelming: Those who received life sentences as youth have virtually **no recidivism** (Bell, 2019), and the requirement of **3 offense-free years on parole already filters for success.**
Won't this send the wrong message to victims' families?	**No.** This bill **does not erase accountability, it honors transformation.** Victims and surviving family members have the opportunity to speak at parole board hearings. Restorative justice processes often include victim-offender dialogue and healing engagement when desired.

What This Bill Does Not Do

- It does **not shorten prison sentences**.
- It does **not guarantee release**: only those already granted parole are eligible.
- It does **not remove accountability**: it requires 18+ years of demonstrated transformation.

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