



RE: Support **SB 17 Parole & Parole Board Changes**

Mr./Madame Chair and Committee Members:

Better Together New Mexico (BTNM) brings together hundreds of advocacy groups and thousands of New Mexicans statewide. Our mission is to unite New Mexicans through grassroots initiatives and work to positively shape the decisions that affect our lives, families, and communities.

BTNM supports SB 17 Parole & Parole Board Changes as it introduces critical amendments to New Mexico's parole process, particularly for individuals serving life sentences. This bill enhances public safety, promotes transparency, and protects the rights of victims and their families. SB17 ensures parole decisions are based on clear criteria, improving fairness and reducing crime in New Mexico.

SB 17 requires the parole board to consider an inmate's compliance with the rules, education, vocational training, rehabilitation, and readiness to reenter society. By evaluating these factors, the bill ensures that parole is granted only to those with a low risk to public safety, reducing the likelihood of reoffending. The bill's emphasis on education, rehabilitation, and readiness for reintegration supports evidence-based practices known to reduce recidivism. This approach ensures that individuals who have shown personal growth are better prepared to avoid reoffending, ultimately lowering crime rates.

SB 17 ensures that parole hearings for homicide cases are not scheduled on the victim's birthday or death anniversary, respecting the emotional impact on families. It also allows victims' families to provide input, ensuring that parole decisions consider the inmate's rehabilitation and the crime's impact on the community. The bill codifies specific factors the parole board must consider, including criminal history, offense circumstances, and rehabilitation. This transparency ensures that parole decisions are made based on clear, consistent criteria, fostering public trust in the parole process.

The bill allows virtual participation in parole hearings, improving accessibility for victims' families and protecting their anonymity. This ensures their voices are heard, fostering a more balanced and just approach to parole.

SB 17 establishes that parole board members may only be removed for cause—such as incompetence or neglect of duty—and requires formal proceedings for removal. This ensures that the parole board maintains high standards and that removals are based on objective criteria, preventing arbitrary decisions. The bill grants the state Supreme Court jurisdiction over parole board member removals, ensuring oversight and preventing undue influence. While concerns have been raised about the application of this process, the intent is to protect the integrity of the parole board and maintain a fair parole system.

Please vote 'YES' on SB 17 Parole & Parole Board Changes.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carla J. Sonntag'.

Carla J. Sonntag
President & CEO