

## **What is the difference between probation and parole?**

Probation is a criminal sentence; parole is one way of completing a criminal sentence of incarceration. In most jurisdictions, first-time offenders are considered for probation, particularly if their offense was nonviolent. A person placed on probation is typically given a jail or prison sentence that is suspended as long as the person abides by the terms and conditions of probation. Common terms require the person to contact a probation officer once a week and to work, go to school, or look for work. Other terms can include required attendance at alcohol treatment or narcotic-abuse programs and educational classes on such subjects as anger management or good driving. The length of probation and its terms are enumerated at the sentencing and once the person has completed the terms of probation, he or she is free of court supervision.

Typically, an offender has been sentenced to an indeterminate or range of years in prison. After the offender has served the minimum amount of time authorized, the parole board decides if the offender is ready to be released from incarceration to finish out the sentence on parole. Parole boards consider the nature and seriousness of the crime, the views of the victim, the progress the offender made in prison, how crowded the prison is, and whether the offender has a someplace to go in the community. If parole is granted, the offender will have to abide by terms and conditions similar to those for probation for a specified period of time. If he or she completes the parole period, the criminal sentence is discharged.

Both probation and parole can be revoked if the offender commits another crime or seriously violates one of the conditions of release. The revocation proceeding requires written notice to the offender, an opportunity to explain and call witnesses, an impartial decision-maker, and a written decision stating the reasons for revocation. If parole is revoked, the parolee goes back to prison and serves the remainder of his or her sentence in jail or prison.