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## Parole Ban Is Lifted Slowly

### Only A Few Inmates Have Been Released

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Scores of violent felons did not suddenly bolt through prison gates after Gov. M. Jodi Rell lifted her four-month ban on parole on Jan. 28.

Instead, because of some new requirements and pre-existing strictures of parole, violent offenders required to serve at least 85 percent of a prison sentence will probably trickle back slowly into society, officials said. "In a very measured and methodical manner," said Brian Garnett, a spokesman for the Department of Correction.

The first to walk the Connecticut streets — Kaiwan Brevard, a 28-year-old man convicted in 2000 of shooting to death a 19-year-old known as "Baby O" in New Haven — was released Wednesday.

Brevard was one of hundreds of inmates left in limbo in late September when Rell's ban on parole for violent offenders went into effect. He was more than nine years into a 10-year sentence and scheduled to be released to parole on Nov. 12. But the ban meant that Brevard had to wait nearly 12 weeks until Wednesday before he could be paroled. He will report to a parole officer in New Haven and must wear an electronic bracelet.

In addition to Brevard, one violent offender has been paroled to another state and a second was paroled but picked up by immigration authorities. Another five are approved for release, but it is unclear whether they will be sent home immediately or if additional checks are required before they are released, Garnett said.

Even if an inmate has been approved for parole, it does not guarantee immediate release. Officials first have to confirm that a parolee has a suitable place to live.

Backlogs continue to clog the system. Other violent offenders whose releases were approved before the ban might be waiting for the Board of Pardons and Paroles to receive the police and court documents now required before it can release anyone.

Immediately after the ban was lifted, Robert Farr, the chairman of the board, said that his agency was

still collecting about 9,000 transcripts and 1,500 pre-sentence investigation reports ordered to thoroughly research the backgrounds of parole applicants.

Rell's ban on parole came on Sept. 21 after a parolee stole a car at knifepoint in Hartford, and two months after two parolees were accused of killing a mother and two daughters and severely beating the father inside the family's Cheshire home. Those slayings led Rell to order a review of the parole system, which stopped the flow of inmates leaving the system through that program.

Now that the ban has been lifted, violent offenders will be entering a parole system with more staff, better training, more programs and greater offender accountability, said Randy Braren, the Department of Correction's director of parole and community services.

Rell's recently enacted criminal justice reform bill will allow the department to hire nine new parole officers and provides beds for offenders in the community. Her budget proposal unveiled Wednesday also includes funding for 13 more parole officers.

An increase in the ranks is key — more officers will allow the department to maintain the smaller caseloads that officers have enjoyed during the temporary parole ban, Braren said. And experts say that smaller caseloads are the key to managing offenders.

Braren also cited the new requirement that all violent offenders released to parole be automatically subject to weekly meetings with a parole officer and a weekly urine screen. Such an intense reporting schedule was not necessarily required of all violent offenders in the past. Additionally, inmates convicted of first-degree burglary, second-degree burglary and second-degree burglary with a firearm are subject to "intensive monitoring," which adds GPS monitoring to the weekly urine screen and face-to-face meetings. The only other category of offender currently monitored by GPS is sex offenders.

"We're tightening up even more in the violent category," said Braren. He said that there will be an almost "presumptive return to custody" instead of a less punitive sanction when a violent offender violates a term of parole.

But, at least one parole officer, five-year-veteran Tonia McCown, said that the system is virtually no different than before the ban, other than that the Board of Pardons and Paroles is required to have more information in hand when making a decision about an offender's release.

Practically speaking, she said, the resources she can offer a parolee in terms of services and time with her are virtually the same.

"I don't feel this served a purpose other than delaying the inevitable, because we've always had violent offenders on our caseload," McCown said.

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