



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

**PATRICIA L. WEST**  
Chairman

**LLOYD L. BANKS**  
Vice Chairman

## *Virginia Parole Board*

November 1, 2024

**MICHELLE P. DERMYER**  
Member

**SAMUEL L. BOONE**  
Member

**C. Phillips Ferguson**  
Member

The Honorable Terrence Cole  
Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security  
P.O. Box 1475  
Richmond, VA 23218

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas, Chair  
Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee  
General Assembly Building, Room 1404  
201 North 9th Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair  
House Appropriations Committee  
General Assembly Building, Room 1223  
201 North 9th Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Secretary Cole, Senator Lucas, and Delegate Torian:

Appropriation Act Item 419 B (Special Session I, 2024) directs the Virginia Parole Board to report on an assessment of the adequacy and functionality of its case system and estimated costs for any necessary system upgrades. In accordance with this item, please find enclosed the report for Item 419 B.

Please accept my apology for the delayed filing of this report. Shortly before the report was due, the software developers let me know that they have a new product. I wanted the opportunity to view it prior to filing the report.

Sincerely,  
/s/ Judge (ret) Patricia L. West  
Chairman

# **VIRGINIA PAROLE BOARD CASE SYSTEM REPORT**

ENABLING AUTHORITY: Appropriation Act – Item 419 B (Special Session I, 2024)

The Virginia Parole Board shall submit a report to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees, no later than October 1, 2024, assessing the adequacy and functionality of their case system and estimated costs for any necessary system upgrades.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Virginia Parole Board began using CORIS for automated case management and records in 2009. The Virginia Department of Corrections also uses CORIS for its automated case management and records. The Parole Board uses a module within CORIS and has access to custom reports generated by CORIS. While CORIS offers many benefits, it has required numerous modifications over the years to bring it to where it is today. Additional modifications are necessary to address issues that have resulted from changes in legislation and in Parole Board member composition. Changes are both costly and take several months to complete.

## BACKGROUND

The Virginia Parole Board (VPB or the Board) utilizes a module within the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) offender management system, CORIS® to manage many Board case management functions. The CORIS system is the intellectual property of Abilis. Over the past sixteen years, CORIS has been heavily customized to address the changing needs of both VADOC and VPB. Abilis charges to make those changes in addition to the annual maintenance expenses, which are paid by VADOC.

The VPB used at least two other automated case management systems in the past. At one point, VPB had a dedicated information technology (IT) staff and a stand-alone parole case management system. However, when parole was abolished in 1995, the budget of the Parole Board was subsequently slashed, staff were reduced, and nearly all support staff were reassigned to VADOC.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after, the VADOC was forced to replace its old main-frame systems to newer technologies. As the VPB had a significantly reduced budget, it was brought under the umbrella of the VADOC's purchase of the CORIS system.

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<sup>1</sup> "Truth-in-Sentencing in Virginia," Ostrom, Cheesman, Jones, Peterson, Kauder. US Department of Justice report, 2001.

In 2006, when the VADOC began its roll-out of CORIS, the assumption was that with the abolishment of parole, the number of parole eligible inmates would decrease and the system would be sufficient to manage the remaining cases. However, with certain inmates becoming eligible for release consideration under Truth in Sentencing and legislative changes, the number of parole-eligible inmates has risen significantly in the last 20 years.

The VPB is responsible for providing parole decisions for five inmate categories:

1. Inmates whose crime(s) were committed prior to January 1, 1995;
2. Geriatric inmates<sup>2</sup>;
3. Inmates who are terminally ill;
4. Inmates who were convicted as a juvenile, given a life sentence, and have served more than 20 years; and
5. Fishback-eligible inmates.<sup>3</sup>

As of July 1, 2024, a total of 3,482 inmates were eligible for discretionary parole consideration or geriatric release, with an additional 189 inmates eligible under Fishback and 156 under the juvenile offender category. Of the categories listed above, the largest growing segment is the geriatric inmate population. The VADOC reported that the state responsible confined population aged 50+ rose from 6,968 inmates in FY23 to 7,265 in FY24.<sup>4</sup> With that increase, the VPB anticipates an increase in the number of inmates eligible for consideration for geriatric conditional release. So, despite the notion of the abolishment of parole, the case management needs of the Board are continuing to grow.

## CORIS FUNCTIONALITY

*Preface to section: the mandate for this report came with no funding attached to hire an IT consultant. As the VPB has no IT staff, this assessment is based on VPB CORIS users and Board member input, as well as meetings with VADOC staff who are CORIS specialists.*

The VPB module in CORIS is dependent on the VADOC's modules and vice-versa. Employees of the VADOC Court and Legal section input sentencing data into CORIS. Then, CORIS uses the inmate's date of birth, age at sentencing, and sentence data to calculate inmate parole eligibility information. The parole eligibility data is then populated to the VPB module. Board actions, such as votes for or against parole release, trigger alerts in many other CORIS

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<sup>2</sup> Geriatric inmates are those who have reached sixty (60 years of age after serving at least ten (10) years of their sentence, or sixty-five (65) years of age after serving at least five (5) years.

<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to the decision of the Supreme Court of Virginia in *Fishback v. Commonwealth* 532 S.E.2d 629 (Va. 2000) and subsequent legislation by the General Assembly, any offender who was sentenced by a jury between 1995 and June 9, 2000 is eligible for parole consideration. This excludes the most violent offenders and those cases in which the victim was a minor.

<sup>4</sup> "Geriatric Inmates in the State Responsible Confined Population FY2024," VADOC Research Unit. July 2024. <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/media/2024/fy2024-geriatric-report.pdf>

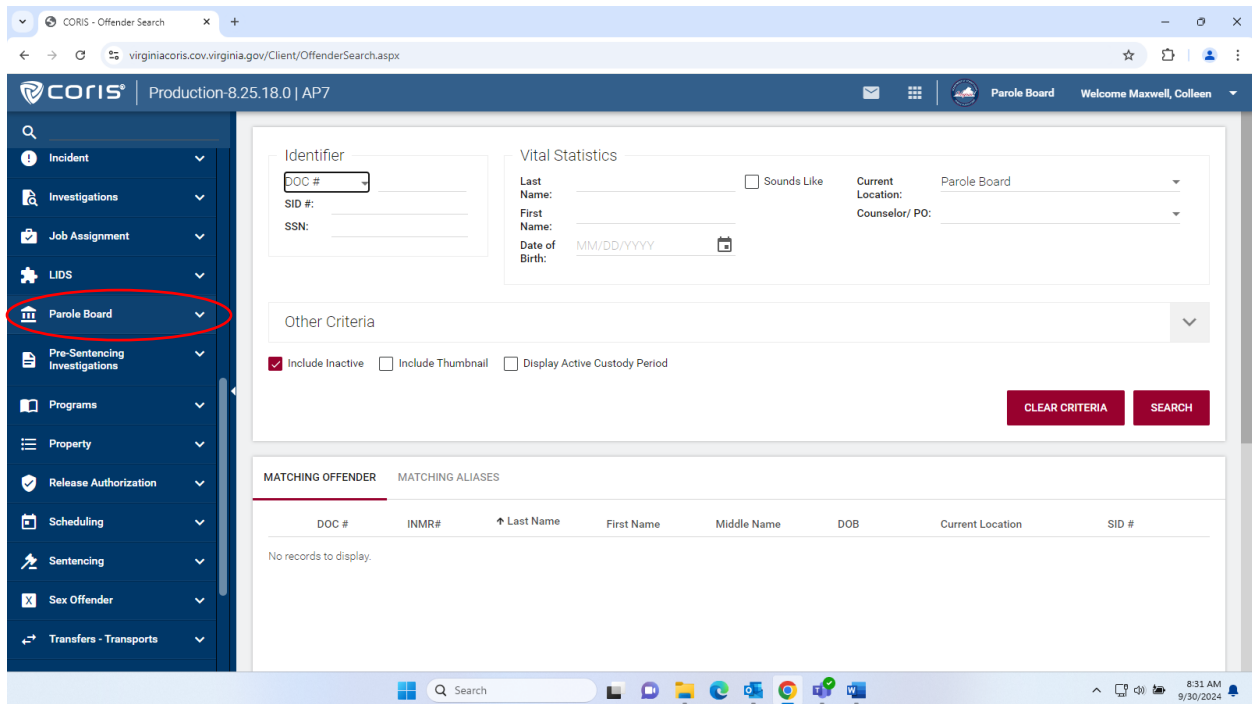
modules for VADOC staff. For example, if an inmate has been approved for parole, this triggers action for VADOC Re-entry staff.

In addition to its interdependence with VADOC, CORIS has numerous agency information sharing components with the other state agencies and systems. The Virginia State Police, the Supreme Court of Virginia, the State Compensation Board, the Virginia Employment Commission, and Department of Social Services are just a few of the entities connected to CORIS.

The interconnectivity is one of the benefits of CORIS. The VPB has access to an inmate's entire criminal history, as well as their history while in VADOC custody. Parole Examiners rely on data in CORIS to compile a complete and accurate report of investigation to meet the VPB's legislative requirements for parole voting. In addition, CORIS allows facility staff within VADOC to know when an inmate is being considered for parole or a vote has occurred. This enables the facility counselors to work with the inmate to address his or her identified needs.

The VPB utilizes two sections in CORIS. As mentioned above, primary usage is within the Parole Board module. In addition, VADOC staff, at the request of VPB, created custom reports for the VPB and its staff. Each element within the Parole Board module serves a different function. While this report will not cover each function, it will provide an overview of the key benefits and challenges of the system.

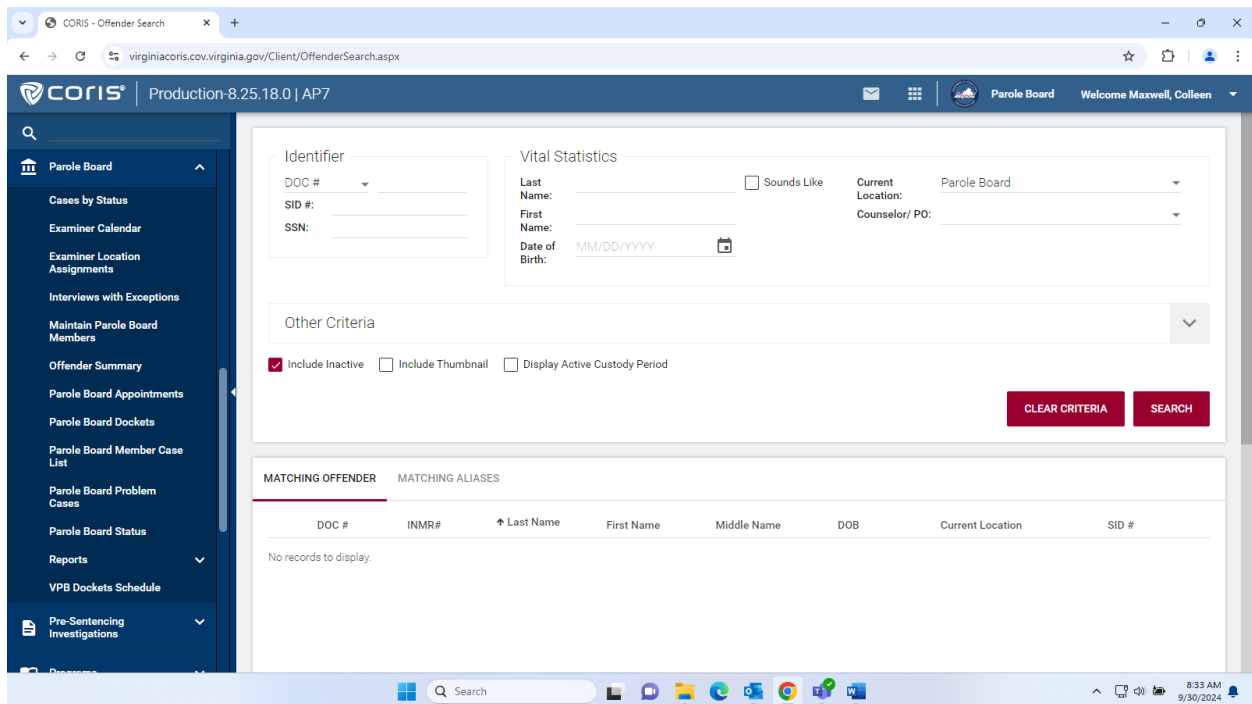
Illustration 1: Parole Board Home Screen in CORIS.



On a nightly basis, CORIS pulls the case names and numbers of inmates who have been identified as being eligible for parole consideration. Again, this is based on the sentencing information input by VADOC staff combined with the inmate’s age at sentencing and current age. The eligible inmates are then put on a docket within CORIS (docketing is both a sub-section of the module and a function) and can easily be viewed and assigned by viewing the case status.

The docket list shows cases that need to be schedule for an investigation for parole consideration. From the docket, VPB staff can place the case on the Parole Examiners Calendar, which is another sub-section in CORIS. This section is utilized to schedule the Parole Interview. VPB staff document the interview and other findings of the investigation in CORIS, as well.

Illustration 2: List of Subsections in the Parole Board Module



Once the parole examiner uploads their report of investigation, CORIS automatically moves the case onto a docket for voting. The case is assigned at random to a VPB member and is listed in that Board member’s queue. After the first member votes, the case is randomly assigned to the next member for their vote until all necessary votes are recorded.

Voting in CORIS is not without issue. *Code of Virginia* § 53.1-136 requires Board members to record the reasons for their individual votes. Board members must review a drop-down list of prescribed reasons and select their choices. Each reason requires a separate “save” click, so voting can be time consuming. In addition, if the reason is other than one of the prescribed reasons, the Board member selects “other” from the list, then types their reason in a text box. When VPB staff run a report of voting for the month, as required by statute, the report simply shows “other,” without any of the details shown.

Voting rules within CORIS have been changed as VPB Chairmen change. For example, a prior Board Chairman wanted voting on cases in which an inmate was sentenced to life for a homicide conviction to stop after two “not grant” votes, as that inmate would mathematically not be able to reach the necessary four “grant” votes to be eligible for parole or geriatric release. Now, the Board questions whether this feature prevents the case from being fully considered.

If a member of the public or an inmate’s attorney inquires about the status of voting, Board staff are unable to determine which Board member has the case in their queue without running the full Parole Summary Report (the report of investigation), which can take several minutes to open if the inmate has a significant history with VADOC.

Lastly, as of July 1, 2024, voting on cases in which it appears the individual will be granted parole must occur in a public meeting. To determine if an inmate may have enough “grant” votes, a preliminary polling must occur. This is recorded as a “vote” in CORIS. If it appears that the inmate is close to the required number, the VPB Administrator stops the voting, schedules the public meeting, and closes the record containing the preliminary votes, and resubmits the case to the Board for final voting.

If the Board wishes to reconsider a case, to re-docket the case, the Parole Board Administrator must “certify” the case then put it back on the docket. This work-around in the system could lead to a non-certified vote, a vote that was in error or did not reach the required number of “grant” votes, being released to the public. This same process must also be followed for a docket to be rescheduled.

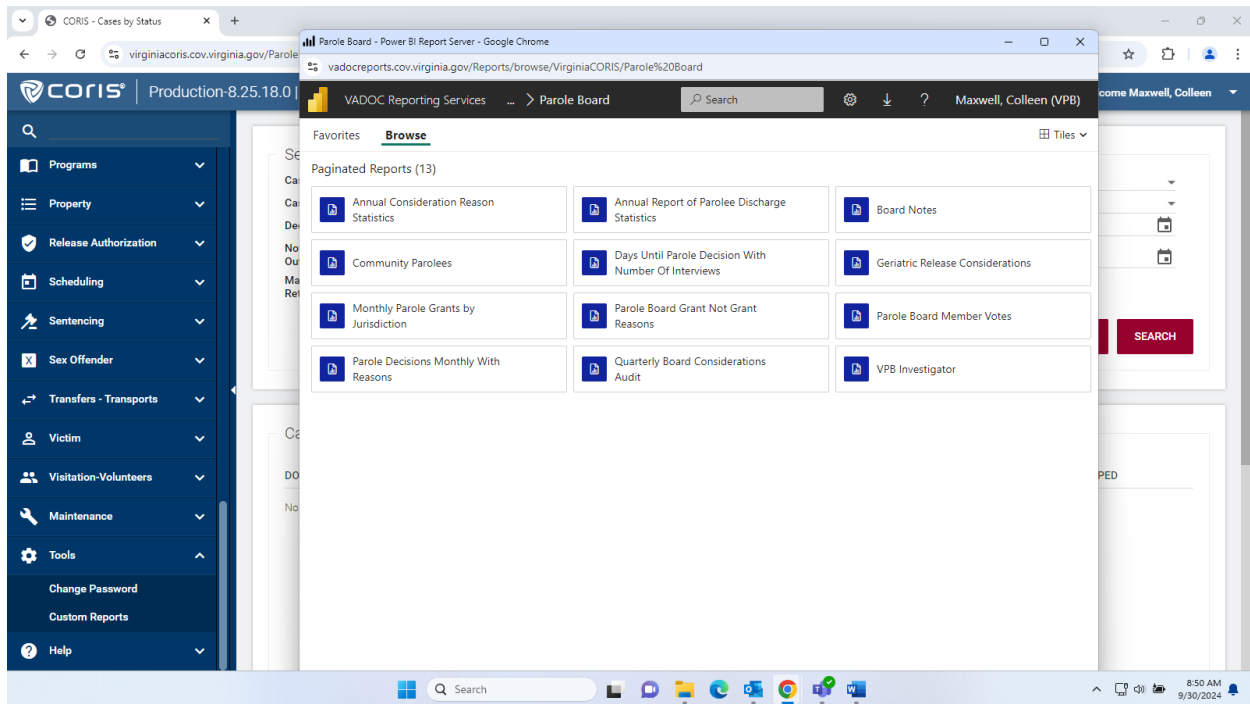
Parole Board staff members schedule one-on-one appointments for Parole Board members in CORIS. Appointments could be with a victim or the victim’s family, advocates, an attorney, or simply a concerned citizen. Board member appointments are then summarized and recorded in the Notes subsection of the inmate’s case summary.

In addition to appointment summaries, the Notes subsection allows users access to records information and contacts, such as victim and Commonwealth’s Attorney notification and input. Users can also attach documents to notes; however, this process is cumbersome. The user must first create the entry, save it, then click edit, then click “go to”, then select “external documents” from a drop-down list, then select the document, save it, then post the note to the system. Retrieving documents is equally cumbersome. A user must select the entry by clicking on it, then click “edit” (even though the user cannot edit the entry), then click “go to”, then select “external documents”, then open the document and choose to save it elsewhere or print it. This is particularly time consuming when pulling records to compile for review under § 53.1-155, which became effective July 1, 2024, and requires that an inmate or attorney be permitted to review *all* information collected for the parole consideration investigation. An average report takes approximately two to three hours to compile and redact for victim information.

The Post-release subsection is also a challenging aspect. If a Major Violation Report is entered, it cannot be edited. The Violation Report must be closed and resubmitted, which results in a duplicate warrant being issued.

The VPB also uses reports that were created for the Board by VADOC staff. The reports have enabled the Board to post votes on a monthly basis as required by *Code*. Annual statistics are available and other data are compiled and accessed through the Reports menu. However, reports are limited based on functional issues within the system.

Illustration 3: Custom Reports Menu



## ESTIMATED COST OF UPGRADES

The VPB relies heavily on VADOC for CORIS support. When any legislative change is made, the VPB notifies VADOC. Then, VADOC prepares a change order and submits it to Abilis. Changes in CORIS are costly and time consuming. Changes are released only three times per year. The VADOC has not charged VPB for their staff's time in creating custom reports nor putting in change orders for the Board.

Abilis' charging structure is based on \$1,200 per day for rewriting code and modifying business rules in the system. What may be viewed by a user as a simple fix, such as allowing multiple selections of vote reasons at one time, likely requires many days of work by Abilis. The number of days varies depending on what is involved in the fix. Based on the required number of changes to address the majority of challenges within CORIS, the VPB anticipates between

\$440,000 and \$500,000. This will bring the user experience to a more acceptable level but will not make the system operate as smoothly as the Board members and staff would prefer.

The VPB met with Abilis on 10/17/2024 to view a demonstration of a new parole module Abilis developed for another state. They believe that it will resolve all user interface issues as well as the reporting issues. When we requested a cost estimate for the new module, Abilis said it could not provide one at this time. The cost would depend on detailed customization necessary to make the other state's product work for Virginia's laws and regulations. Our colleagues with VADOC estimated that based on other Abilis projects, it will be approximately \$2.5-3 million.

After viewing the Abilis demonstration, representatives from VPB met with VADOC Chief Information Officer, Zacc Allen and his key staff members. Mr. Allen informed the VPB that VADOC will be posting a request for information (RFI) for the potential replacement of CORIS. Based on that information, the Board does not believe that replacing the existing parole board module with a new module from Abilis would be good use of public funds. It would be more prudent to wait until the RFI process is complete and join with VADOC on their project. The Board let Mr. Allen and his staff know that the Board lacks the staffing and expertise to attempt to bid out independent of VADOC.

Knowing that the replacement of CORIS, if the VADOC goes that route, will likely take several years to complete, the VPB would benefit from an additional \$500,000 to make the necessary adjustments to its existing parole board module within CORIS.