Put Victims on the Parole Board

Reserves two of the seven seats on the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles for victims of serious crime, or close family of victims — represented among those who decide, not only heard by them.

90TH LEGISLATURE • PROPOSAL
Amends Government Code §§508.031, 508.032; adds §508.0451
Status: draft — ready for an author

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
Victims represented, where a board decides, among those who decide • Help see perpetrators get the justice they deserve

CHAMPION SOUGHT
Author / co-author / endorser / testifier / adviser — whichever role your group can take

THE ASK We ask victims' advocacy organisations to **champion, endorse, testify for, or advise on** this bill — and members of the 90th Legislature to consider authoring it. No organisation is a supporter until it commits.

1 — THE PROBLEM VICTIMS FACE TODAY

The Board decides who is released, whose parole is revoked, and whether to recommend clemency. Texas law gives victims real rights — notice, an impact statement, a protest placed in the file, a chance to be heard. Every one is a right to speak *to* the Board. Not one places a person *on* it who has lived what victims live. Sunset found in 2024 that the Board's decision-making does not ensure fairness, consistency, transparency, or data discipline.

2 — WHAT THIS BILL DOES

- **Reserves two of the seven existing seats** — no new seats — for victims of offences on Texas's serious-offence list (art. 42A.054, taken as a whole), or close relatives of deceased victims, where the offender was convicted. A guilty plea counts the same as a trial conviction.
- **Makes them full members.** They vote on parole, revocation, and clemency — including capital clemency — with the same training as all members. Seats fill as terms expire.
- **Keeps the member's own case private.** The appointment is publicly identified as a victim-category appointment, but eligibility is established quietly by attestation — case details are the member's to share or withhold.
- **Deliberately does not** change parole rules, guidelines, eligibility, or any offender's rights, and adds no riders.

3 — HOW IT HELPS VICTIMS

BEFORE	AFTER
A family writes a statement into a file and waits for a decision from a room it never enters.	Two of the seven members bring lived experience into roughly two of every seven panels, and every full-Board clemency decision.

> *"Every right my family has in the parole process is a right to speak to the Board. None of them places anyone on the Board."*
> — Lawrence Baitland, father of Cayley Mandadi, murdered October 29, 2017

4 — BALANCE & SAFEGUARDS

A victim member may **never** take part in a case they were personally involved in: not their own offender's case, not a co-defendant's, and not any case in which they protested, submitted an impact statement, or testified. That line — personal involvement in the specific case, not the category of their experience — is in the statute, not board policy.

5 — HOW HARD WILL THIS BE TO PASS?

●●●●○ **High**

No state reserves this large a share — two of seven (28.6%) would be the strongest victim representation on any parole board in the country. Expect the impartiality objection and capital-clemency opposition to lead; the bill only works if the Governor will appoint from the category. No constitutional amendment is needed. Fallback: one reserved seat (Virginia / Ohio).

6 — RISKS & MITIGATIONS

RISK / OBJECTION	MITIGATION IN THE BILL
Members chosen for their victimisation cannot be neutral	Statutory recusal from any personally involved case, plus the same oath, training, and guidelines. No constitutional right to parole exists; composition is a legislative choice.
Victim members voting on capital clemency	One Board, one membership — mercy decided by a body embodying the whole community; recusal bars any member's own case.
A veto bloc — or a token	Serious releases need five of seven votes: two members can neither block nor carry one. The seats give presence and voice.

7 — WHO IS LIKELY WITH US — AND AGAINST US

POTENTIAL ALLIES

Texas Crime Victims United — survivor-run; victim voice is its mission. To approach.

Parents of Murdered Children — Texas chapters — the constituency itself. Ask: testify.

Texas Council on Family Violence / TAASA — allies on victim voice. Ask: endorse, advise.

LIKELY OPPONENTS

Criminal defence bar — biased decision-maker, due-process grounds.

Capital-defence organisations — victim members in capital clemency.

Civil-liberties and reform groups — fairness and grant-rate concerns.

Best counter: excluding a whole class because a crime was committed against them is itself unfair.

8 — POTENTIAL AUTHORS FROM BILL SCORING

CANDIDATE	SCORE*	WHY THEY FIT
Sen. Joan Huffman — SD 17	**71**	Authored the 89th's principal victims' bills; chairs Senate Finance.
Sen. Tan Parker — SD 12	**67.5**	Vice-Chair, Criminal Justice (89th); carried the Board's Sunset bill.
Rep. Sam Harless — HD 126	**71.5**	Chair, House Corrections (89th); monitoring the Board's Sunset bill.

* Score = the advocates' prior bill-scoring rating (89th Legislature backtest). Re-verify rosters and committees in January.

COST
Minimal — no new seats or salaries; recruitment, attestation, and support only.

EVIDENCE IT CAN WORK
Virginia guarantees a victim representative on its board; Ohio reserves one seat — both boards function normally.

NEXT STEP
A 20-minute briefing, then a yes or no on championing. Contact: Lawrence Baitland.