

# ARIZONA BOARD OF EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY



Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2024

# ARIZONA BOARD OF EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY

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CHAIR OF THE BOARD MINA MÉNDEZ  
VICE CHAIR SAL FRENI  
BOARD MEMBER LOUIS QUINONEZ  
BOARD MEMBER SUSAN STODOLA  
BOARD MEMBER VACANT

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# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Governor Hobbs:

In accordance with A.R.S. §36-1944, it is with profound gratitude that I present the Arizona Board of Executive Clemency's Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report. In this document, I provide updates regarding some of the activities executed during the 2023 and 2024 calendar years.

I want to express my thanks to you, Governor Hobbs, for overseeing such a well-qualified group of professionals who carry out their work in an objective and unbiased manner. The Board appreciates the support of the Governor's Office and members of the legislature, as well as stakeholders such as the Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry, and the Attorney General's Office.

In June 2023, Board Member Michael Johnson retired after serving on the Board for over six years. The Board anticipates the appointment of the 5th Board member during Fiscal Year 2025. With the assistance of the Attorney General's Office, the training plan and goals for the new member are already in place. This fiscal year, the Board saw a significant increase in commutation (77% increase), and probable cause and revocation hearings conducted (53% increase). The Board will continue to work diligently in meeting its deadlines in spite of the increased caseload. The Board is currently undergoing its Sunset Review and Performance Audit that will be completed in Fiscal Year 2025 and we look forward to the recommendations of the auditors to ensure the agency is complying with the law and providing excellent service to the public. As outlined in this report, those goals include improvements in the scheduling process, improving board member training, and ensuring that both inmate rights and crime victim's rights are protected during the clemency process.

The Board looks forward to another successful year in Fiscal Year 2025.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mina Méndez', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Mina Méndez  
Chair

# BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

## FISCAL YEAR 2023

### Board Operations

- ❖ The Board conducted 2,468 total hearings in FY2024, an increase of 45% from FY2023.
- ❖ The Board's Hearing Officer held 631 probable cause hearings and the Board conducted 1,272 revocation hearings, an increase of 53% from FY2023.
- ❖ In an effort to maintain the elimination of its backlog of commutation cases, the Board conducted 199 Phase I commutation hearings, an increase of 77% from FY2023.

### Administrative Operations

- ❖ The Board began its Sunset Review and Performance Audit in the fall of FY2024, which is currently on-going.
- ❖ Staff members continue to crosstrain on all functional areas to ensure the needs of the Board are met.
- ❖ An electronic document records management system is in the testing phase and documents are in the process of being scanned and uploaded.

## MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

The Arizona Board of Executive Clemency is a five-member board with each member appointed by the Governor, and is statutorily empowered to make decisions regarding:

- ❖ Discretionary release of those inmates who are parole and/or home arrest eligible; (inmates whose crimes were committed on or before December 31, 1993, or other eligible categories of inmates);
- ❖ Revocation of parole (or community supervision for crimes committed on or after January 01, 1994) for offenders found to be in violation of the terms and conditions of their release;
- ❖ Absolute discharge from parole; and

- ❖ Modification of release conditions and release rescissions.

The Board also makes clemency recommendations to the Governor on requests for:

- ❖ Commutation of sentence, including death penalty sentences;
- ❖ Reprieves in matters related to death penalty cases; and
- ❖ Pardons.

## **Mission Statement**

To protect public safety and contribute to a fair and effective justice system.

## **Vision**

A Board of Executive Clemency that makes decisions in a timely manner consistent with public safety, victim concerns, inmate rights, and wise use of state resources.

## **Values**

- ❖ Public Safety ~ Our decisions focus on safety for Arizona citizens.
- ❖ Integrity ~ We are truthful and trustworthy, conducting ourselves honorably and ethically.
- ❖ Service ~ We serve and are responsible to the public.
- ❖ Respect ~ We treat each other and everyone with courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- ❖ Excellence ~ We strive to do our best and more.
- ❖ Accountability ~ We are responsible to ourselves and others for our decisions and actions.
- ❖ Leadership ~ We are positive role models.

# BOARD ORGANIZATION

The Board of Executive Clemency is composed of five members with each member appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate. The Governor appoints the Chair for a two-year term. Members are recognized as state employees with full benefits.

## **Chair Mina Méndez ~ Term Expiration: January 18, 2027**



Ms. Mendez was born in Phoenix and grew up in Phoenix and Mexico City. Ms. Mendez graduated from the University of Arizona College of Law in 1995, after receiving her undergraduate degree in Religious Studies from the University of Arizona. Ms. Mendez is the first law school graduate from her family. She served as a Superior Court Commissioner from 2004 to 2013 and as a Judge pro tem for the Superior Court and as a private mediator from 2013-2017. Before her appointment to the bench, Ms. Mendez worked in the private sector and served as an Assistant Attorney General for six years. Ms. Mendez is one of the coordinators for the Latina Mentoring Project, which started as a book club hosted by Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Mary Murguia. She is currently working to expand the Latina Mentoring Project throughout the United States and working with Latina judges and attorneys in other states to develop and expand the program. Ms. Mendez is a member of Los Abogados and the Arizona Women Lawyers Association and has served on committees for both organizations.

## **Vice Chair Sal Freni ~ Term Expiration: January 18, 2027**



Sal Freni is a retired 30 year veteran of the Phoenix Police Department. During his career he served as an officer, detective and supervisor in numerous assignments: Patrol, Drug Enforcement Bureau, Property Crimes Bureau, Tactical Support Bureau, Airport Bureau, Major Offender Bureau, Public Affairs Bureau, and the Violent Crimes Bureau. Mr. Freni was raised in Phoenix and holds degrees from Phoenix College (AA), Northern Arizona University (BS), and has completed the Arizona Post Leadership Program (Class #7).



**Board Member Louis Quinonez ~ Term Expiration: January 19, 2026**



Louis Quinonez was appointed to the Arizona Executive Board of Clemency in February 2017. He is a native of Phoenix, Arizona and a graduate of Arizona State University (1987, Bachelor of Science, cum laude). He served twenty-seven years in Federal law enforcement, including a one-year internship with U.S.D.A.-OIG; three years as a reserve agent with the Air Force Office of Special Investigations; three years as a special agent with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; and twenty-three years as a special agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. He served his last fourteen years of Federal service as a supervisory special agent, including assignments as a group supervisor, division operations officer, field intelligence supervisor, HQ program manager, HQ training manager, assistant country attaché (Mexico), and HQ branch chief. He is a recipient of the American Legion Police Officer of the Year honors. He had an interesting transition from his law enforcement career, serving as a vice president for a police consulting and training firm; an adjunct instructor for Glendale Community College (administration of justice); and a student success coach for Rio Salado College.

**Board Member Susan Stodola ~ Term Expiration: January 15, 2029**



Susan Stodola accepted a gubernatorial appointment to the Arizona Board of Executive Clemency in March 2023. She has resided in Phoenix since 1984, after moving here from Rockford, Illinois. Susan obtained her BS degree in Secondary Education and History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1979, and she later obtained her Master's Degree from NAU in Counseling and Human Relations. She completed an additional nine credits in counseling from Ottawa University. She was employed for twenty-eight years as a probation officer and supervisor of probation officers, both in Rockford and with the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department. For the past fourteen years, she has worked as a capital mitigation specialist, as part of the defense team working on both capital and non-capital murder cases. She has served on the board of Gompers Habilitation Center, Rosie's House and the Human Rights Committee at the Arizona State Hospital. She has also served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

**Board Member ~ Vacant**



# BOARD STAFF

## **Executive Director ~ Gretchen McClellan-Singh**

Gretchen was hired by the Board in July 2022. Prior to that, she was the Victim Services Administrator for the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Arizona. Gretchen worked as an Advocate for the non-profit agency Homicide Survivors, Inc. in southern Arizona and then as an Advocate and Bureau Chief at the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, where she received the Advocate of the Year award in 2015. Gretchen worked as the Grant and Contract Administrator for the Maricopa County Attorney's Office where she wrote and administered a number of local, state and federal grants. She also served as the Manager of Advocacy at the Pinal County Attorney's Office for several years.

Pursuant to Arizona Revised Statutes 31-402, the Executive Director serves at the pleasure of the Board and reports to the Board through the Chairman. She is responsible for meeting the needs of the Board through oversight of all administrative, operational, and financial functions for the Board including implementing and directing all policies and procedures, personnel matters including hiring, training, discipline as well as performance evaluations of all administrative staff members. The Executive Director also leads in budget preparation, forecasts, and expenditures.

## **Hearing Officer ~ Josephine Jones**

Josephine Jones was hired by the Board in October 2023 and has over 30 years of professional experience with much of her career involving mental health in the justice system. She worked with the Maricopa County Public Fiduciary where she served as director of the agency providing court ordered guardianship and conservatorship services for individuals when no other person or agency was willing or qualified to serve. She also worked with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office where she prosecuted cases involving issues of competency and insanity. While with the Maricopa County Public Advocate and Maricopa County Public Defender, she spent over 15 years representing individuals undergoing court orders for mental health evaluation and treatment. She also represented youth in dependency matters who were psychiatrically hospitalized. During her time with the Arizona Attorney General's Office, she represented the Arizona State Hospital.

## **Administrative Support Staff**

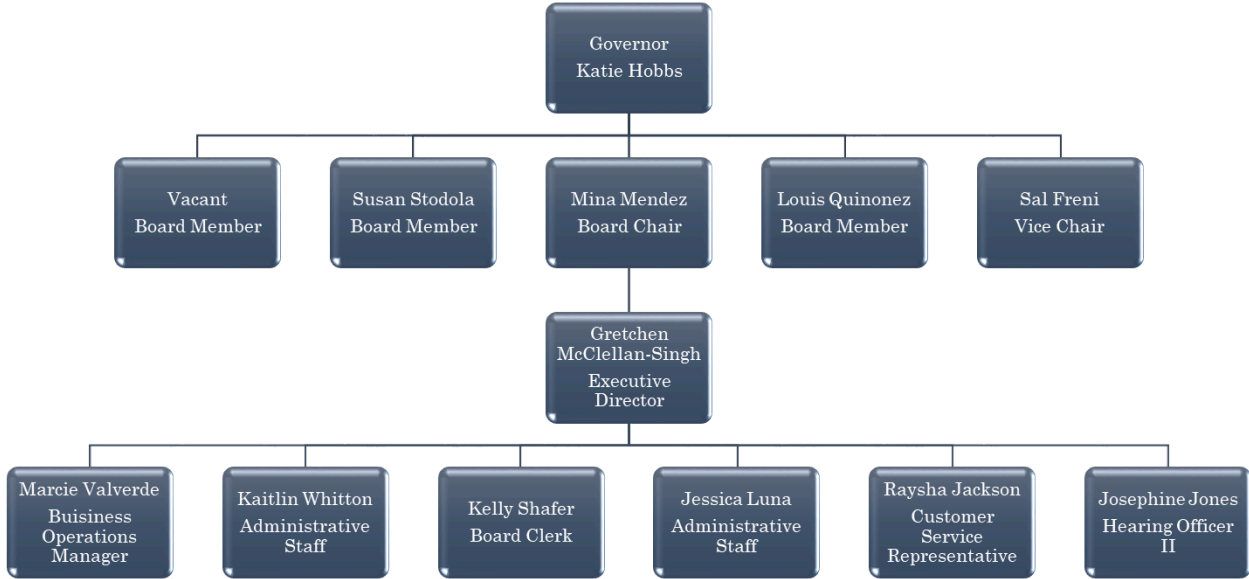
Business Operations Manager	Marcellina Valverde	AUN 06532
Administrative Services Officer I	Jessica Luna	AUN 06895
Executive Staff Assistant	Kaitlin Whitton	AUN 02542
Boardroom Clerk	Kelly Shafer	AUN 02542

The Administrative Support Staff have technical, complex duties and responsibilities that require a specific knowledge and skill set. Each of these staff members gathers, and maintains, statistical information as related. Each day, they interact with other agencies, victims, and members of the public. Staff prepare packets of information for each hearing that include documents from ADCRR, the courts, victims, prosecutors' offices, and inmate supporters. This process is particularly critical as Board Members review these comprehensive packets to facilitate their decision-making. Staff also process and fulfill public record requests according to law and Board policy and take on special projects as directed by the Executive Director.

Customer Service Representative III	Raysha Jackson	AUN 08330
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The Customer Service Representative's job function is to provide statutorily mandated notifications to victims, officials, and other concerned individuals and entities. This individual also provides customer service to incoming phone inquiries specific to hearings for which victims have officially opted in to participate. This is a partially grant-funded position.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Board's FY2024 General Fund appropriation was \$1,420,800. The Board also received \$28,000 in grant funds from the Arizona Attorney General's Victims' Rights Program through the Office of Victim Services for partial funding of the Victim Notification Coordinator position. This year, the Board experienced some savings due to vacancies that were utilized for the replacement of the Board's security scanner machine and the installation of a wall and door to secure the Board's lobby following three security breaches.

## BOARD ACTIVITY

The Board is statutorily authorized to conduct hearings for clemency and non-clemency matters. Non-clemency hearings do not require a recommendation to the Governor but instead the Board makes decisions on its own. These are Parole (412A), Parole (412B), Home Arrest, Absolute Discharge, and Modification, and Rescission and Revocation hearings for parole, "TIS" (truth in sentencing), and home arrest.

The Board can only hear clemency cases for state of Arizona felony convictions. Clemency can take one of three forms: a reprieve, a commutation of sentence, or a pardon.

All hearings conducted by the Board are done in accordance with the Open Meeting Law.

### **Board Decisions**

The Legislature abolished parole in 1993. Individuals whose crimes were committed prior to January 1, 1994 are eligible for parole. After completing a portion of their sentence, they are certified as eligible by the ADCRR and referred to the Board for a parole hearing.

In general, individuals who committed an offense on or after January 1, 1994 are sentenced under strict sentencing guidelines known as "Truth in Sentencing (TIS)." Unless statutorily mandated otherwise, most inmates serve approximately 85% of

their sentence in prison and are then released to the community for supervision of the rest of their sentence.

Current litigation and legislation has increased eligibility for parole for crimes committed after 1993. Although parole was no longer a legal sentence beginning in 1994, judges continued to sentence defendants to parole. Recent litigation now requires the Board to hear parole cases for anyone sentenced to a life sentence after 1994 while a juvenile, and for anyone whose sentence specifically uses the word parole. Litigation is pending to require the Board to hear parole cases for anyone sentenced after 1994 to life with the possibility of “release.”

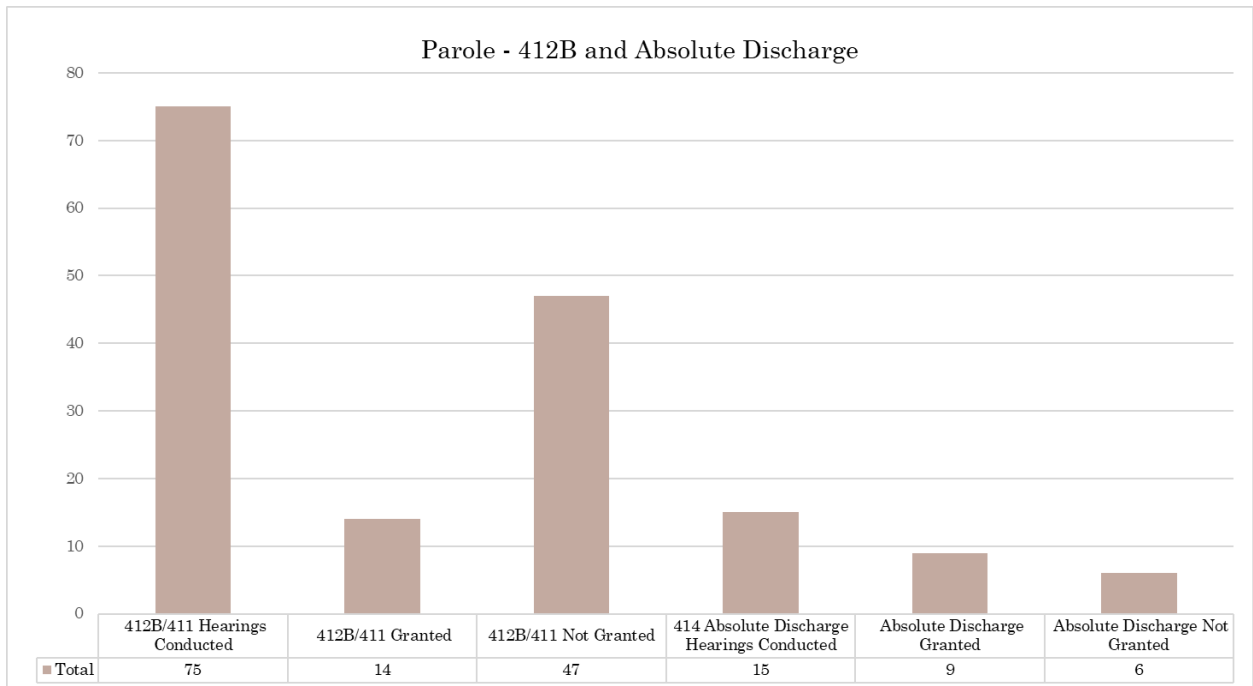
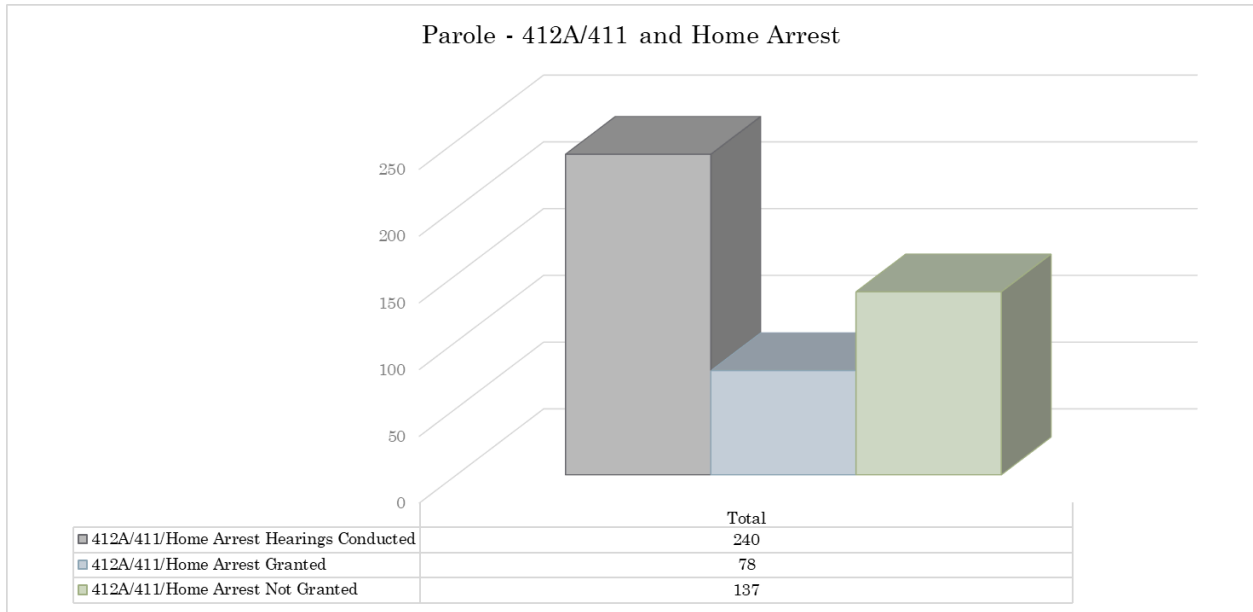
Additionally, recent legislation requires anyone who took a plea that specifically uses the word parole, even when sentenced after 1994, to be eligible for parole. These new classes of inmates now eligible, or potentially eligible, continue to increase the Board’s caseload currently and over the coming years.

A significant amount of Board time is spent on a significantly larger docket of revocation hearings. These hearings arise when an inmate on release status violates the conditions of release and ADCRR issues a warrant of arrest. The allegations of violation can consist of technical violations, or may be new criminal charges.

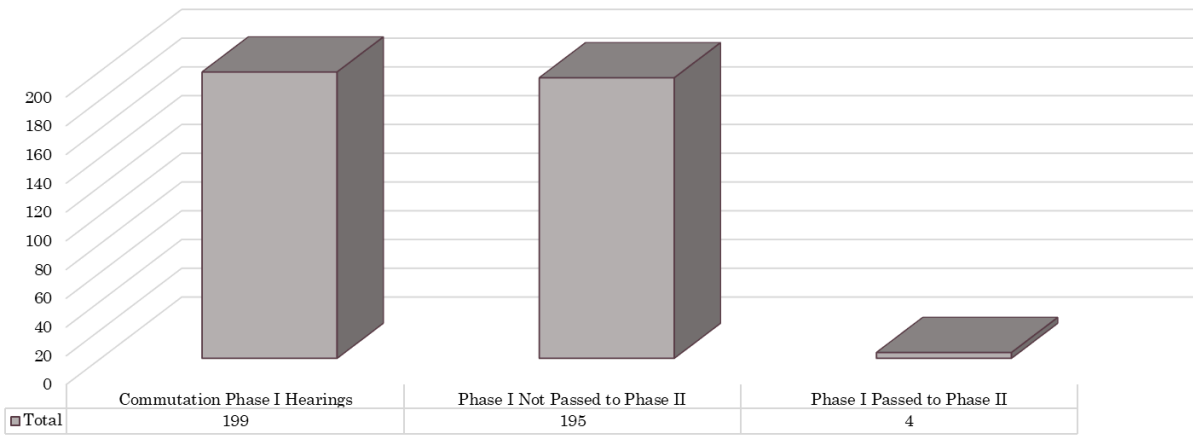
### **Executive Clemency**

Perhaps the most visible work of the Board involves executive clemency proceedings, which are petitions from individuals seeking clemency in the form of a pardon, a commutation of sentence including in death penalty matters, and reprieve. These matters require a majority vote in order to be recommended to the Governor for that action. If the action is recommended, the Board’s staff prepares a submittal and it is hand-delivered to the Executive Office for a final determination.

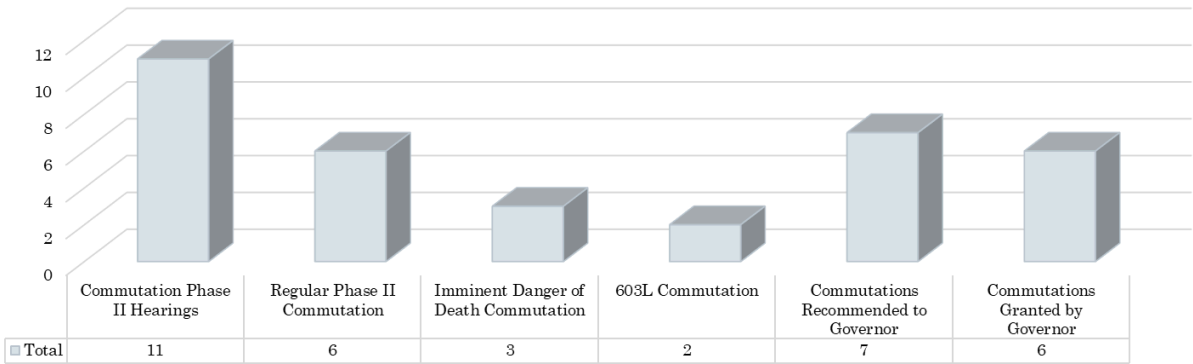
# STATISTICS



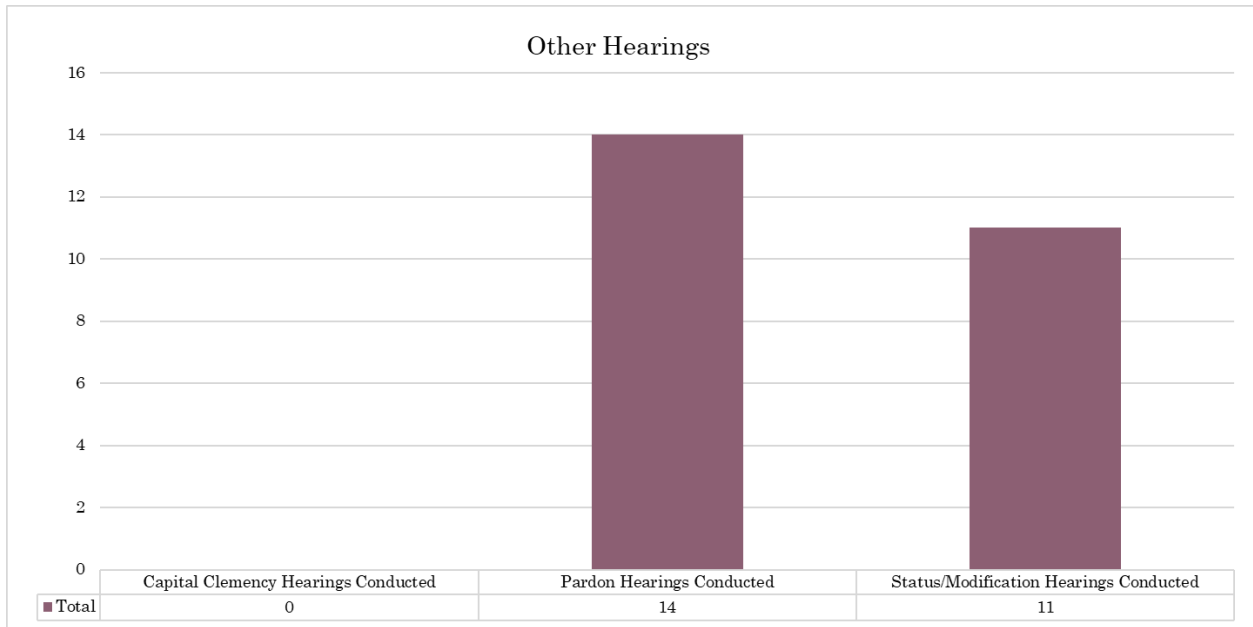
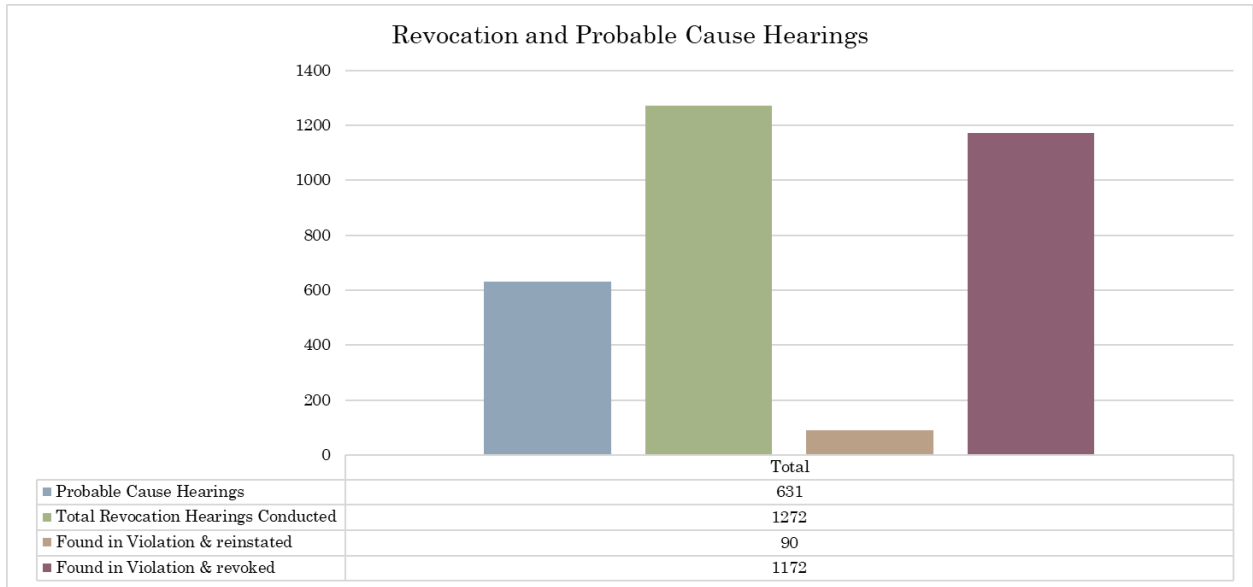
### Phase I Commutation of Sentence



### Phase II Commutation of Sentence







# VICTIM NOTIFICATION

The Board is mandated to provide hearing notification within specific timeframes and is dedicated in its efforts to provide notification and information to crime victims. These rights are set forth in A.R.S. §13-4417(A) Request for notice; forms; notice system and A.R.S. §13-4414 Notice of post-conviction release; right to be heard; hearing; final decision; free electronic recording.

Board Members are informed of victims' intent to participate at a hearing and receive the outcome of that hearing. Victims may exercise their right to participate virtually, by phone, in person, or via written statements. Most victims also receive advocacy services from the Office of Victim Services with the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry.

Since 2015, the Board has received grant funding from the Arizona Attorney General's Office of Victim Services under the Victims' Rights Program. In FY2024, the Board was granted funding of \$28,000 for the Board's Victim Notification Coordinator (Customer Service Representative III). The Board's Victim Notification Coordinator provides statutory notice to opted-in victims of upcoming hearings, their right to provide input and the outcome of any proceeding. Victims may also request that certain conditions and restrictions be imposed on the offender if released to supervision. Victims are surveyed to solicit important feedback to continue to improve the process. Improving the process is a key part of the Board's strategic plan.

# STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

## **Electronic Record Document Management System**

Problem: The Board currently uses paper copies of the packet for Board Member review.

Goal: Implement a paperless packet review process and electronic management system.

Status: An electronic records management system has been developed and records are currently being scanned and uploaded.

## **Board Member Training**

Problem: Board members should receive ongoing training throughout the year.

Goal: Conduct at least 8 hours of ongoing training each fiscal year.

Status: The Board received more than 8 hours of ongoing training from entities including the Arizona Justice Project, the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry and representatives from Arizona State University's College of Law and School of Social Work.

## **Maintain Elimination of Clemency Case Backlog**

Problem: The Board previously eliminated a backlog of 120 commutation cases. The goal is to maintain that progress.

Goal: To eliminate the backlog of clemency cases including commutation and/or pardon.

Status: The Board implemented a review process for pardon and commutation cases to reduce the processing time for commutation and pardon cases. However, with the significant increase in the number of applications received and hearings conducted, commutation hearings are now taking place an average of 120 days after receipt of the application.