

Waiving Away the Chance of Freedom

Exploring Why Prisoners Decide Against Applying for Parole

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Little is known about inmates' decisions regarding seeking release on parole, even though many choose to waive their parole hearings. Using semistructured, in-depth interviews with 25 adult male parole-eligible inmates who had waived a parole hearing, we seek to better understand the reasons inmates forgo the possibility of parole. We frame the study in rational choice theory, which suggests that inmates balance the perceived costs and benefits of remaining in prison versus returning to the community in reaching their decisions. A large majority of inmates attributed the decision to waive their hearings, in part, to concerns about the hearing process (e.g., parole denial likely, fear of negative experience), and most also listed various reasons that made remaining in prison a better outcome compared with release on parole (e.g., prison easier than parole, fear of revocation). The findings suggest that inmates' parole waiver decisions involve multiple factors that merit further examination.