

# Parole, Recidivism, and the Role of Supervised Transition

William Arbour<sup>1</sup>

Department of Economics, University of Toronto

Steeve Marchand<sup>2</sup>

Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne



## Introduction

Parole — the conditional release of prisoners — allows incarcerated offenders to complete the last portion of their sentence in the community. Parole's net effects on offenders are unclear: on the one hand, it shortens the incapacitation period of prisoners, but, on the other hand, parolees may benefit from increased rehabilitation assistance at the time of release.

## Parole in Quebec

We study parole in the context of Quebec, Canada, where parole is granted to a narrowly selected group of low-risk offenders. About 3/4 of parolees stay in halfway houses, where they receive targeted assistance towards their reintegration. On top of therapy, they can learn how to run errands, how to apply for a job, or how to get health insurance.

## Implications

1. Low-risk offenders benefit from parole, in a context where they receive substantial assistance at release
2. Parole successfully decreases total time spent incarcerated
3. Halfway houses are a likely mechanism behind these effects

## Methodology & Results

Because of the selection process, parolees are different from non-parolees on several aspects, and they cannot be readily compared. We exploit the random assignment of offenders to parole board members to isolate the causal effect of parole on recidivism. We find that parole decreases the likelihood of recidivism by 8 percentage points within five years. In addition, parolees spend on average a total of four fewer months incarcerated than non-parolees.



Halfway houses in Quebec

<sup>1</sup>william.arbour@mail.utoronto.ca

<sup>2</sup>steeve.marchand@unimelb.edu.au

