



CHRISTMAS RELEASES 2020

The Minister for Justice, Ms Helen McEntee, T.D., announced today that 36 prisoners will be granted varying periods of temporary release this Christmas under the Criminal Justice Act 1960. This figure represents approximately 1% of the overall prisoner population. The corresponding numbers released for Christmas in 2017, 2018 and 2019 were 142, 137 and 113 respectively.

The numbers approved temporary release for Christmas 2020 are greatly reduced in comparison to previous years arising from a number of factors including:

- A reduced number in custody leading to a reduced pool of eligible prisoners;
- increased use of structured temporary release programmes including Community Return and Community Support Schemes during the year;
- reduced numbers of applications as some prisoners not wishing to avail of Christmas temporary release due to the risk of contracting Covid-19 whilst in the community

Many of the prisoners being released are nearing the end of their sentences and the overriding concern when considering the applications is the safety of the public. In addition to compassionate and humane considerations, other criteria taken into account include the nature and gravity of the offence, length of sentence served to date, prior record on temporary release, behaviour while in custody and previous criminal history.

The periods of release vary from a few hours up to 6 nights. All releases are subject to stringent conditions and any offender who breaks these conditions may be arrested and returned immediately to prison by the Gardaí.

Given the particular challenges posed by COVID-19, specific additional conditions have been added to prisoners' Temporary Release conditions, including an obligation to abide by all public health guidelines when at home or in public. All prisoners availing of Christmas Temporary Release will be required to quarantine on return to prison for up to 14 days or until they return a negative test for Covid-19.

The sensitivities of victims are an issue that has also been taken into account by the Minister and in some cases additional specific conditions will also apply. Furthermore all registered victims with the Irish Prison Service victim liaison service will be informed in the cases where prisoners are receiving Christmas Temporary Release.

Ends

22 December 2020

For further information contact

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Note for Editors



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The Irish Prison Service Press Office will provide an update on Temporary Release Returns on Monday 4th January 2021.