**Background**

Minnesota statute allows a life sentence to be applied to individuals convicted of murder in the first degree and for certain criminal sexual conduct offenses.

On August 1, 1989, Minnesota changed the mandatory minimum prison term for a life sentence to 30 years. Prior to this change, the mandatory minimum prison term for a life sentence was 17 years.

**Review Process**

The commissioner of corrections is given the authority to assign life-sentenced offenders to parole after they have served their minimum term of imprisonment.

The commissioner and an advisory panel of Department of Corrections (DOC) employees conduct an initial review of the offender’s readiness for release three years before they reach their minimum term of imprisonment and then at intervals determined by the commissioner.

Reviews include information collected from facility staff, the community where the offender was sentenced and any surviving family members of the victim. At the reviews, the commissioner will either assign a projected release date or continue the case with directives to be completed prior to the next review.

Each review is evaluated individually, with treatment and programming recommendations unique to that case.

The Hearings and Release Unit maintains schedule for these reviews and works with the Victim Assistance/Restorative Justice (VA/RJ) Unit, the committing county and the case manager at the facility to compile a packet of information about the offender. The VA/RJ Unit will contact the victim’s surviving family and others affected by the crime to allow them input in the process.

The committing county will develop a community investigation that will capture the sentiment of the community, law enforcement, prosecutor and sentencing judge regarding the offender at the time of the crime and at the time they are being considered for parole.

Facility staff put together all information available on the offender; which could include making a recommendation to transition to lower custody or parole.