

Chair Prozenski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, & Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Damon Motz-Storey and I live in NE Portland. I work at Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility and I serve on the Board of Directors of both the American Friends Service Committee and Quaker Voluntary Service. I am commenting here only on behalf of myself. I support Senate Bill 835 and urge you to vote yes on this bill.

I was born and raised in the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, and was taught from an early age to recognize the inherent worth and value of every single human being. In the Quaker theology, I was taught to honor and worship "that of God" that lives inside all people, no exceptions. Prison reform work has long been an important ministry of Quakers worldwide, and I understand it to be a vital component of racial justice to work to dismantle the systems of mass incarceration that stem from the unsuccessful "war on drugs" that led to mandatory minimum sentencing laws that disproportionately impact Black and brown communities and people who live in poverty.

Compassionate medical release is essential to honoring the dignity of all human beings, no matter what they have done or who they are. When I read about crowded prison cells and lack of personal protective equipment in prisons during the pre-vaccination era of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became crystal clear to me that our systems needed to be changed. No one should die behind bars, away from their community and their loved ones, merely because the conditions of prisons were insufficient for keeping them alive and healthy. The term "adults in custody" inherently affirms that the state of Oregon has a duty to properly care for the health and wellbeing of adults in their custody. When the conditions of prisons prevents Oregon from doing so, the only moral choice is to pursue compassionate medical release. The criteria outlined in Senate Bill 835 will help clarify, make more transparent, and expand this life-saving process so that we might minimize the horrifying tragedy of losing a loved one while they are still serving prison time. Nothing about this bill will threaten public safety, as that will still be weighed heavily as release requests are considered. Rather, this bill offers an opportunity to honor the dignity and worth of human life.

On March 10th, 2021, Street Roots published the names and photographs of the 42 adults in custody of Oregon prisons who have died of COVID-19 and its complications. 16 of these people would have been released between 2020 and 2023. Perhaps not all of these people should have been released, but legislators identified 2,000 prisoners who would have been safe to release, which would have made everyone who remained safer. Governor Kate Brown chose not to do so, instead releasing fewer than 200 adults in custody total during the pandemic. These folks had children, parents, siblings, friends, and other loved ones waiting for them on the other side of their prison sentences. I share their names and ages below as a reminder that lives are at stake behind policy decisions, and we can make choices that save lives and affirm our human worth every day.

Greg Chavez, 53
Louis Jackson, 63
Dennis Howes, 66
Warren Hill, 73
David Windham, 54
Barry Larsen, 64
Lavern Carlton, 82
Richard Torres, 69
Brian McCarvill, 68
James Kempf, 81
Timothy McElroy, 62
Donald Bennett, 71
Gilberto Pedroso, 77
Wayne Denson, 74
Michael Abeln, 57
Gregory Burns, 53
Nicholas Zangari, 51
James Moore, 81
Joseph Jones, 76
Roger McPherson, 59
Andrew Boyer, 59
Bernardino Garcia, 32
Paul Villines, 56
Peter Bara, 47
Antonio Arevalo, 89
John Fuller, 71
Cecil Norton, 72
Rennie Dearborn, 69
Austin Coleman, 57
Douglas Turnbow, 76
Lloyd Ward, 76
Carlyle Sands, 59
John Freeman, 64
James Hargrave, 70
Jessie Ballew, 71
Donald Easley, 71
Russell Lee, 57
Juan Tristan, 58

James Owens, 78
Donald Hilburn, 58
Phyll Mendacino, 65
William Vance, 72