

RE: Support Compassionate Medical Release Reform  
SB 520  
To: Senate Committee on Health Care  
March 9, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

We write to testify in strong support for Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 520, which will help incarcerated Oregonians that are sick or dying, have an opportunity to be safely and humanely released to get the care they need at home with their loved ones.

Since 2015, Oregon has had the fourth-largest aging prison population in the country, which has resulted in needless prison deaths and millions of taxpayer dollars spent. Under current state medical release laws, more people die awaiting a decision on their medical release application than are actually released. Compassionate Medical Release reform will place decisions about release in the hands of those that are medical professionals, expand medical eligibility to those who have serious health issues and ailments, and provide support and resources to applicants during the process.

It is unacceptable that from 2013 to 2020, 131 adults in custody with severe medical conditions applied for compassionate medical release and that, of those applicants, only nine were able to complete the process and were granted release. In that same period, 11 applicants passed away while waiting for an outcome.

We strongly urge you to pass SB 520 out of the committee.

Thank you,  
Regna Merritt  
Thomas T. Ward, MD