

Submitter: Catherine Bax
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB520

Senate Bill 520 Testimony

RE: Senate Bill 520, Regarding Compassionate Release

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

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in support of SB 520.

My name is Catherine Bax. I am a retired Physician Assistant and currently a member/volunteer of Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good, a broad-based community organizing alliance and a member of St Andrew Catholic Church. It is my background of having worked for over 30 years as a medical professional, being a community volunteer and being a member of a faith-based organization that compels me to testify in support of SB 520.

This bill makes sense economically, practically and, most importantly from a humanitarian perspective.

As I understand it, this bill is an effort to find a way to make it possible for seriously and terminally ill incarcerated patients to be released early from prison. Basically, this would allow them to be cared for in a more medically appropriate and compassionate setting, ideally by their family and loved ones. Presently early or compassionate release of Oregon prisoners occurs relatively infrequently even though Oregon has a rapidly aging prison population and a high percentage of incarcerated people with serious progressive and terminal illnesses.

I want to emphasize that the individuals who are eligible for early compassionate release under SB 520 are people who are terminally ill, that is have less than 12 months to live or who are severely disabled, that is unable to feed or dress themselves or to use the bathroom independently. It is hard to imagine that these are individuals who are any longer a threat to public safety if they are allowed to return to their families for the remaining months of their lives.

I think it is inspiring that the criminal justice system, the prisoner advocacy community, the medical community in Oregon and the Oregon Legislature have come together to address the ethical and human dignity concerns of our state's seriously and terminally ill incarcerated men and women.

The burden and the opportunity to recognize the dignity of all human beings throughout their lives is incumbent on all of us. Actually, I think, it is one of the most important things we can do for each other.

Catherine Bax, Physician Assistant (retired)

