



**Andy Harris, MD
Portland, OR**

Senate Committee on Health Care

March 13, 2023

RE: Support for Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 520

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

My name is Andy Harris, testifying in support of SB 520, on behalf of Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices.

I live in Portland, but for three decades I worked as a physician in Salem, and saw many patients from OSP and OSCI. Oregon's prisons have a growing population of aging adults, some in very poor health. The Covid pandemic highlighted multiple risks to inmates living in crowded facilities with stress, poor hygiene, marginal nutrition, and suboptimal medical care.

The State of Oregon needs to do a better job of meeting the health needs of older inmates with serious medical illnesses. Compassionate medical release laws should be workable, timely, and understandable. Those inmates who have terminal illnesses, or who are on hospice, should be able to apply for humane release and get the medical care they need through programs like Medicare or Medicaid available outside the corrections system.

Under current state medical release laws, it takes too long, typically over half a year, to process an application. SB 520 would establish an independent Medical Release Advisory Committee (MRAC), within the Board of Parole, comprised of 5–13 licensed medical professionals appointed by the governor to review compassionate medical release applications and make release recommendations objectively from a medical and public health perspective.

Compassionate Medical Release reform will allow more input from medical professionals, will expand eligibility for those who have serious health issues, and will provide support and resources to applicants during the process. Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices urges your support of SB 520.

Thank you,

Andy Harris, MD
OCCV Board Member
andyharrismd4@gmail.com