

Submitter: Virginia Feldman
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure: SB520

Dear Committee on Health Care,

SB 520 would greatly improve Oregon's process of compassionate early medical release from prisons. My husband & I, as physicians, have worked with immigrants at the Tacoma, Washington detention center. We know how many inmates get inadequate care there. We have worked with prison advocates who see less than good care in Oregon prisons as well. It is clear that some health conditions cannot be managed at all, or not properly, inside of prisons. All Oregonians, on either side of the bars, have a right to access the medical care and treatment they need. All this was worse during the COVID-19 crisis. Other crises will come: prisons are not well-equipped to care for public health.

My husband & I would wade through hundreds of pages of records to try to find out WHERE NEXT for ailing patients. There was no review organization to assure the proper care was given--totally different in every medical organization we've worked with, where there are regular reviews to see if a prison patient really needs to be discharged. Or has so little time to live that compassion should drive us to make sure their last months of life are properly managed medically. Right now, requests for early medical release are difficult to submit and aren't reviewed by medical professionals; there is no organization devoted to ferret out /study these medical records. SB 520 would create an independent Medical Release Advisory Committee (MRAC) of health professionals within the Board of Parole and make recommendations for inmate medical releases based on improved medical and public health criteria. Criteria would be phased in over time and the Board of Parole will still hold the final say. We must pass SB 520 this session so that we can begin implementing an improved, health-based approach to caring for Oregonians who are serving prison sentences.

Health care is a human right for all - please support SB 520.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ginny Feldman