

Submitter: Joshua Marquis
On Behalf Of: self - retired District Attorney
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB1027

Thank you Chair Prozanski and members of the Committee for taking my testimony.

My name is Joshua Marquis and I am speaking to you from Astoria where I served 25 years as the elected District Attorney for Oregon's north coast. But today I am before you as a retired prosecutor, with no official title, speaking for no organization, but my own lived experience, as I continue to keep faith with a couple dozen families with whom I made hard journeys, as we brought the men (and rarely women) to justice for murdering their family members.

You already have three excellent pieces of written testimony, most significantly from the current head of the Parole Board, which while marked "Neutral" on this bill appears to lay out very well-found concerns over an unwise speeding up of a process where mistakes can be fatal - to the next set of victims.

Previous Governor, Kate Brown granted more commutations than ALL previous Oregon Governors combined, and many of those who had been sentenced to life in prison for murder had their sentences were summarily reduced to immediate parole eligibility - without any notice, as required - to either the victim or the DA's office that handled the case..

I have been participating in the Parole Process in the limited fashion prosecutors are allowed, for more than 30 years. The rules have changed slightly, but the idea was always that the Parole Board hears primarily from inmates, obviously wanting to show their very best face, who will tell them of all the positive things they've done since entering the state's custody. Victims rarely make it this far, and for reasons of economy of time are limited to 15 minutes. But before SB 1027, it was common for the Parole Board to hold two, even three hearings to determine if the inmate was even appropriate for release.

SB 1027 cuts that all down to a single hearing, after which the Parole Board must make its decision, which is then carried out - VERY QUICKLY - by releasing the inmate within 60 days.

A couple important facts. Oregon's prisons have not contained car thieves or people caught with a baggie of drugs or a drunk who stole a car for a long time now. It is not easy to get into ODOC, and while violent crime in the community is UP, the DOC population is down, almost 25% in the last 4 years. And it is not because violent crime is down 25% in Oregon over the last 5 years.

Some people might say, "Don't worry that " X" case won't be affected, because it is outside the timelines of this bill." I hope so, but time and again legislation is amended at the last minute precisely so that a group of inmates (in this case murderers who committed their crimes before Sentencing Guidelines went into effect on Dec. 1, 1989) get the benefit of the legislation.

It is striking to me, in my current role as an informed outsider, that every single piece of submitted testimony is in opposition to this bill, and the very people I had thought had proposed it - the Parole Board - are pretty unequivocal in their eloquent testimony as to why this is a bad idea.

I urge you to listen to them.

Thank you.