

Submitter: Ann Turner  
On Behalf Of: self  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: SB1560

Testimony SB 1560: Support Compassionate Medical Release Reform  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
February 7, 2024

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the Committee,  
My name is Dr. Ann Turner. As a retired physician and a member of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, I am writing in support of SB 1560. As a physician, I worked in a community health center with underserved, low income, patients from minority communities.

Incarcerated individuals who have developed serious, complex medical illnesses, are terminally ill or so incapacitated that they cannot perform basic activities of daily living without assistance are better cared for at home or in the community near family and loved ones. Although Oregon has a statute providing for early compassionate release, it is not effective. SB 1560 will establish a legislative task force to research and analyze the best way for Oregon to create a bill that will achieve the goal of releasing adults in prison who are ill and no longer a threat to the community. It is almost impossible for incarcerated individuals to receive the level of healthcare they need in the last days, weeks or months of their lives. Besides being the humane, compassionate and "right" thing to do, it will save the state's taxpayers millions of dollars. Those in prison are not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid, meaning that taxpayer dollars are funding their care.

Of the many who apply for compassionate release, less than 10% of those applying are released and many die awaiting a decision. Oregon has one of the oldest prison populations in the country and those in prison age faster than individuals in the community.

A new statute should include an evaluation by medical professions to determine eligibility for release, based on their medical diagnoses and functional capacity. The process should be transparent, accessible, and easy to follow, and should require that decisions be made within a short time frame so that those incarcerated do not die awaiting a decision.

As a physician and someone who has cared for many patients at or near the end of life, I feel strongly that Oregon must enact a statute that is congruent with its values of compassion and humanity.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Ann Turner, MD

Member, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

