

Oregon Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation
Senate Bill 835

Regarding Compassionate Release

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Committee Members,

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas, an environmental health scientist/epidemiologist. I want to add these comments to my earlier testimony in support of Senate Bill 835.

When we speak about public health we include all members of society, including persons in custody. As I previously stated, mass incarceration is a public health crisis. What happens in the prison setting affects the health and well-being of the greater society. When persons are incarcerated, there are health ramifications on the families and children left in the community. There are health ramifications on the victims left to deal with their loss. When people in all parts of our society are treated in an unjust manner it affects the health of other members of society. There is evidence that long term discrimination affects the health of those persons discriminated against. And long term poverty affects the health of those persons in poverty. These two things combined affect the overall health of the larger community as we cannot separate our mental, emotional, or physical impacts on each other by simply locking people away from sight. The pandemic has highlighted the fact that we share susceptibility to factors that affect our health, and that we have to address solutions to the whole of society in order to effectively survive these crises. This is why SB 835 is so important. If we have a health crisis in prisons, we have a health crisis in the greater community. We do have a health crisis in prisons that is not being addressed and that is affecting the overall physical and mental health of the public. Health care has to be sensitive to the circumstances that contribute to disease and illness. The effects of incarceration on the health of individuals cannot be ignored and has to be considered in our justice system, or we will not be able to solve this public health crisis.

Thank you for allowing me to add this testimony in support of SB 835.