



Chair Patterson and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 520. My name is Noah Bein, and I am state policy manager for the Justice Action Network (JAN), the nation's largest bipartisan criminal justice reform organization. JAN works in nearly 20 states across the country. We support lawmakers enacting bipartisan, data-driven justice reform laws that make communities safer.

Senate Bill 520 is the result of a careful, evidence-based process led by Sen. Michael Dembrow and Rep. Lisa Reynolds and driven by system stakeholders. This is a common-sense reform for Oregon. **Releasing from prison older people facing severe medical challenges is the humane and morally correct thing to do. But the evidence is also clear that it can be done safely without endangering the public.** Research shows these individuals are less likely to reoffend post-release than younger people.

**This should be a bipartisan issue.** We see lawmakers of all political stripes leading the way toward a fairer, more humane—and yes, cost-effective—justice system through compassionate release bills like the one before you today. As the American Conservative Union Foundation wrote in a statement supporting similar reform to the federal system:

*"All human beings have inherent dignity and value. Even those who have been convicted and incarcerated for crimes have dignity; unfortunately, our criminal justice system continually fails to recognize this. Prisoners sentenced years and sometimes decades ago under the wave of draconian sentencing of the past have turned our prisons into highly secure nursing homes."*

SB 520 should not be viewed as a bill stemming from one political ideology or another. Rather, conservatives and progressives have come together on this issue to recognize that it is a morally correct and fiscally sound decision to establish a better process for releasing elderly prisoners who face severe medical challenges at the very end of their lives.

**Oregon has an opportunity to fix the failures of its current system.** Data released by the Oregon Department of Corrections at the request of the group FAMM tells a tragic story. Over much of the last decade, from 2013 to 2020, just nine people were released through the early medical release process. 11 people died while awaiting either an assessment, a decision, or their release from prison.

**This bill streamlines the process, removing obstacles and replacing them with a clear path forward.** SB 520 provides the chance for Oregon to act with compassion, guided by medical and public health expertise. JAN urges the swift passage of this important legislation. If we can assist members of the committee in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me at [noah@justiceactionnetwork.org](mailto:noah@justiceactionnetwork.org).

Sincerely,

Noah Bein  
State Policy Manager  
Justice Action Network

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<sup>i</sup> <https://conservativejusticereform.org/issue/elderly-in-prison-and-compassionate-release/>