

RE: Support Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 520
Senate Committee on Health Care

March 13, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

My name is **Stephanie Kaza** and I live in **Portland, Oregon**. I am writing to testify with support for Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 520, which will greatly improve the process for providing safe, humane, and compassionate options for dying people in the prison system.

While such a process already exists, it is too slow and inefficient to be of help when the time is near for someone in decline. This bill offers a way to expedite these decisions on behalf of those in their last days who would like the option to be in a home setting with friends and family.

Though I myself do not have experience with the incarcerated, I am writing here from my faith principles and practices as a lay-ordained Buddhist and as a Unitarian lay minister. I draw on my training in end-of-life doula care and my experience with friends and family at the end of their lives. Most people would choose to be at home rather than anywhere else when they die. This must surely also be true for prisoners. It is unfortunate that over the past ten years, 100+ adults in custody with serious medical conditions applied for compassionate release and only nine were granted release.

I understand that Oregon has one of the largest aging prison populations in the U.S., and this has now created the situation where Oregon taxpayers are paying for end-of-life medical care for prisoners. Often medical expenses at the end-of-life are some of the highest in a person's life because of the challenging impacts of stroke, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other health conditions on the aging body. Compassionate Medical Release reform will place decisions about release in the hands of medical professionals, will expand medical eligibility for those who are incarcerated with serious health issues and ailments, and will provide support and resources to applicants to encourage higher rates of success.

As the body and mind deteriorate, the dying experience can be painful, frightening, and disorienting. I believe in offering compassion to those in this stage of life, in whatever way possible – through comfort care, kind companionship, familiar surroundings, and anything that helps put a person at ease as they release from this life and all they have suffered.

SB520 aligns with these values and helps add some degree of civility for those who have been incarcerated and their loved ones. With these modifications, the Compassionate Medical Release process becomes a viable path out of suffering in the end of life.

I strongly urge you to pass SB 520 out of the committee.

Thank you,
Stephanie Kaza
Portland, Oregon