

Submitter: Carleene Houk  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: SB1560

RE: Support Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 1560 Senate Committee on Judiciary

February 5, 2024

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Carleene Houk, and I live in Portland, OR. I am writing to testify in strong support for Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 1560, establish a legislative task force that researches and analyzes the matter of adults in custody who are aging, dying, and medically infirmed in prison, as well as the pitfalls of the current compassionate medical release process. It is our hope that the information gathered will lead to policies and procedures that help incarcerated Oregonians who are sick or dying have an opportunity to be safely and humanely released to get the care they need at home with their loved ones.

Since 2015, Oregon has had the fourth-largest aging prison population in the country, which has resulted in needless prison deaths and millions of taxpayer dollars spent—just in the 2023-2025 biennium, the Department of Correction's Health Services was allocated \$441 million, which is a 120.5% increase over the past decade. More importantly, Oregon's current early parole release process is not working properly for individuals in custody who are dying, aging, and/or struggling with activities of daily living.

From 2013 to 2021, 166 adults in custody with severe medical conditions applied for compassionate medical release. Of those applicants, only 12 (roughly 7%) were able to complete the process and were granted release. In that same period, 11 applicants passed away while waiting for an outcome.

Studying Compassionate Medical Release can lead to recommendations that place decisions about release in the hands of those that are medical professionals, expand medical eligibility to those who have serious health issues and ailments, and provide support and resources to applicants during the process.

I work with people incarcerated in the Oregon Department of Corrections, and regularly hear that delays in care are common in ODOC. The Therapeutic Level of Care Committee within ODOC is responsible for reviewing a person's treatment plan

and determining whether to approve or deny certain procedures, treatments, or provider visits. Sometimes outside provider recommendations are denied by the TLC committee. Other times, significant delays occur even after treatment is approved, which can detrimentally affect the incarcerated patient's prognosis.

I support compassionate medical release and the creation of a task force around this issue because all Oregonians deserve timely medical care and close contact with their outside support systems when their medical needs are acute or life-threatening. The Oregon Department of Corrections does not have the staff or equipment needed to provide incarcerated people with the level of care they would receive outside of a correctional setting, and delays in care can have disastrous impacts on people who are incarcerated.

I strongly urge you to pass SB 1560 out of the committee.

Thank you,  
Carleene Houk