

Submitter: Alexander Coven
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB1560

RE: Support Compassionate Medical Release Reform, SB 1560
Senate Committee on Judiciary
February 6, 2024

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

My name is Alexander Coven, and I live in Portland. 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.

In my professional capacity, I work closely with incarcerated persons. Many of my clients are suffering from severe medical conditions that the Oregon prison system is ill-equipped to address. Compassionate Medical Release will not only have the benefit of saving substantial taxpayer money, but will also affirm our values -- by

preserving the dignity of those who are dying or suffering significant medical illness. We want those in custody who are sick and dying to be able to spend their remaining time with their loved ones, not suffering in prison.

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

Thank you,

Alexander Coven