



Date: February 6, 2024

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA)

RE: Support Compassionate Medical Release Reform, Senate Bill 1560

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

My name is Esther Kim and I am the Director of the Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA). OHEA is one of ten regional health equity coalitions across Oregon and we serve Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties. We are a people of color-led collaborative, organized to center and uplift the wisdom of our communities of color through racial justice informed health equity policies and practices as part of the movement to dismantle white supremacy and shift the imbalance of power.

We are writing in support of Senate Bill 1560, Compassionate Medical Release Reform, which will establish a legislative task force to research adults in prison custody who are aging, dying, and medically infirmed and assess the limitations of the current compassionate medical release process. This task force would investigate and collect information to lead future policies, practices, and procedures to alleviate the suffering of imprisoned Oregonians who are sick or dying and have yet to have had the opportunity to be released with humanity and dignity.

In the last 8 years, 12 out of 166 adults in prison custody were granted compassionate medical release. In that same time, 11 applicants passed away while waiting for a decision. Our current process can delay and deny vital, time sensitive care. Changing this system is not only a moral responsibility in providing care to all Oregonians, but a fiscal one. With the fourth largest aging prison population in the country, millions of taxpayer dollars have gone to allocations for the Department of Corrections Health Services. Just last year \$441 million was budgeted for the biennium, a 120.5% increase over the past decade.

Oregon lawmakers have an opportunity to provide a path to compassionate care for some of our most vulnerable populations, people in prison with serious underlying and debilitating medical conditions which is, at its core, a human rights and health equity issue. With this, OHEA strongly urges you to pass Senate Bill 1560 out of the committee.

Thank you, Oregon Health Equity Alliance