

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

Thursday, February 8th

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

My name is Samantha Hernandez and I am the Healthy Climate Program Director at Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (Oregon PSR), an organization of over 2,000 health professionals and public health advocates from across the state working to address the gravest threats to health and survival. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Oregon PSR to voice our support for SB 1560.

Over the last few years, one of the many injustices that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted is how prisons fail to protect the health of adults in custody. Crowded prisons with insufficient access to masks and hygiene infrastructure have caused Oregonians in prison to become sick and die from COVID-19. People with histories of incarceration are already in worse physical and mental health according to research by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is well documented that incarcerated people have a higher prevalence of acute and chronic health conditions than the general U.S. population, including overall lower life expectancy. Incarceration under standard conditions in U.S. prisons reduces life expectancy an estimated 2 years of future life for each year of incarceration. Because of the health vulnerabilities and poor health outcomes adults in custody face, prison is no place for the sick and dying.

Despite our state's aging prison population as the fourth largest in the country, we do not have a humane and effective system in place to handle release of individuals whose continued incarceration does not serve them or our community. We've learned that between 2013 and 2021, 166 adults in custody applied for compassionate medical release and only 12 were able to complete the process and were granted release. In this same seven year time period, 11 applicants passed away while waiting for a decision.

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

The US affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize

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PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Oregon's compassionate release system is simply not working. Current criteria for early medical release are too narrow, requests are not reviewed by medical professionals, and the application process is inaccessible and slow.

Fortunately, Senate Bill 1560 would create a task force to research and analyze the pitfalls of Oregon's current compassionate release process. SB 1560 will lead the way to more effective policy that places decisions about early compassionate release in the hands of medical professionals and provide much needed support and resources to adults in custody during the application process and post early compassionate release. Oregon PSR strongly urges you to pass SB 1560 out of the committee.

Thank you,



Samantha Hernandez
Healthy Climate Program Director

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