

To: Members of Congress and Staff

FR: Daniel Landsman, Director, Federal Legislative Affairs

RE: What to do when constituents ask for help with compassionate release

FAMM is a nonpartisan, national advocacy organization that promotes fair and effective criminal justice reforms to make our communities safe. Founded in 1991, FAMM promotes change by raising the voices of families and individuals who are directly affected by sentencing and prison policies. FAMM is in routine contact with 39,000 prisoners in the federal Bureau of Prisons and many of their families and loved ones in the community.

One of the issues FAMM works on is compassionate release. Federal law provides for early release in prison when a prisoner develops “extraordinary and compelling reasons,”¹ typically a terminal condition, debilitation, advanced age, or extraordinary family circumstance. The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) determines who is eligible for compassionate release and is empowered to bring a motion to the court that sentenced the prisoner for a reduction in sentence.

FAMM hears routinely from family members of federal prisoners who are seeking compassionate release. Many times they are trying to determine the status of the prisoner’s compassionate release request. Unfortunately, once the request has been made, the prisoner and his or her family often cannot learn any more information. Prisoners may be so debilitated they cannot pursue the inquiry and family members are routinely denied access to such information by the BOP. They are often quite concerned, especially so in cases where their loved one is weakening or nearing death.

When we hear from families in this situation, one thing we advise is to contact their member of Congress. We tell them to call the district office and speak with a caseworker. We explain that their Senator or Representative can ask the Bureau of Prisons liaison for information about where things stand with the request.

When you hear from a constituent seeking information about the status of a compassionate release request, or, for that matter, other concerns about treatment in the federal Bureau of Prisons, you can direct the question to:

Jennifer L. Edens, Chief, Office of Legislative Affairs, Federal Bureau of Prisons
jedens@BOP.gov
202-514-9663
320 First Street, NW, Room 628 Washington, DC 20534

When you receive a response you can share it with the constituent. This is a very good way to help constituents in a difficult situation find out what is happening with their loved one’s compassionate release request. **If you want to learn more about compassionate release, please contact Daniel Landsman, Director of Federal Legislative Affairs, 202-822-6706, dlandsman@famm.org.**

¹ 18 U.S.C. sec. 3582(1)(1)(A).