

4 Things You Can Do for Your Loved One Seeking Compassionate Release (Federal)

Learning that a loved one in prison is very ill, disabled, or even dying is extremely difficult. You can feel helpless, panicked, and confused. Here are some ideas to help you in this trying time to best support your loved one in negotiating the compassionate release process.

1. Become informed, organized, and educated. The goal is to know where things stand, as much as you can, with your loved one's application.



- Learn the rules governing compassionate release.
- Select one family member to be the family representative/point of contact.
- Keep your loved one's register number handy.
- Keep a notebook or computer file, organized chronologically, on all communications and notes about your loved one.
- As much as possible, get the full name, email address, position, and phone number of any staff person with whom you are in touch. Record that in your notebook along with whatever they tell you.
- If possible, ask the prisoner to request and then send you:
 - medical records about the condition(s);
 - the request for compassionate release and any recommendations or denials from the BOP.

2. Develop allies/informants.



- If possible, find one sympathetic staff member, such as a doctor, nurse, counselor, or caseworker, who is willing to keep in touch with you and answer your questions. If it is someone with real information, such as a doctor or caseworker, or someone with decision-making authority, ask him or her if you can check in with him or her from time to time. See if your loved one needs to and can sign a form authorizing the prison to provide information.
- Be polite—even when the person you are talking with is not. You want to keep channels open.
- You are not alone. Join our Facebook group [FAMMilies for Compassionate Release](#).

3. Involve your member of Congress. If the effort stalls or the loved one is stonewalled, contact your representative.



- Contact your congressional delegation by reaching out to the lawmaker’s office caseworker (that is the person who handles constituents’ concerns, not to be confused with the prison caseworker) in their local (district) office. You can find out who your senators and representatives are [here](#). Go to their official website to find their office nearest you.
- Call the senator(s)’ and/or representative’s office. Using the information gathered in your notebook, explain the problem simply. Be prepared to tell them key dates and findings and have a clear request (e.g., “My loved one was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer four months ago, asked for compassionate release three months ago, and has heard nothing; no one will answer my calls at the prison and I don’t know what to do. Can you help me?”).
- Do not argue about the legal facts of the case; instead, convey a clear picture of the problem your loved one is confronting and your deep concern about their well-being. Your representatives cannot help with your loved one’s legal case, so keep focused on what you need now: help finding out what’s happening with your loved one’s compassionate release request.
- The office will reach out to the Bureau of Prisons and ask about your loved one’s situation. The office will receive a letter from the BOP that they will forward to you.

4. Consider telling your story to FAMM.



You are not alone. FAMM is currently working with Congress and other legislative bodies to change the process so that it works as intended. This will take time. We need your stories to help fix the problem nationwide. While we cannot get your loved one out or advocate on his or her behalf, we are keeping track of the issue and would like to hear from you.

