

My name is Michael Howington, an inmate at the Jessup Correctional Institution, and I am writing to you in support of HB0157, which would deliver enhanced compassionate release opportunities for infirm and/or elderly persons in prisons. The inadequate medical care within correctional institutions and rare opportunities to be approved for medical or geriatric parole have led to a large population of inmates, like me, who remain incarcerated despite posing a minimal risk to public safety and a significant cost to taxpayers.

I began serving my life sentence in 1980, and I am now 71 years old. I am a Vietnam Combat Veteran, and PTSD and drug addiction that developed after my service contributed to the crimes I committed. When I started serving my sentence, I was filled with anger and hate. In 1984, I was shot for trying to escape prison, and I served 4 years in lock up for my actions. In 2000 my life was beginning to change; I gave my life to the Lord and I have less anger towards the world and have been sober for 20 years. In the institution, I work to help other inmates change their lives the way I changed mine. I have been certified as an Observation Aide and have been commended for my outstanding assistance with the staff and inmate population. I have been a pastor since 2006 and helped start a ministry at the JCI regional hospital, where we visit terminally ill patients. However, I have not been able to visit with these inmates in the last 12 years because of my personal health issues.

While incarcerated, I had two strokes and have been confined to a wheelchair for over 9 years. I have changed significantly as a person while serving my sentence. I would like to spend my last years with my children and grandchildren to teach them the things that I have learned in my life. I would like to work with any state agency to work with youth to deter them from a life of crime. I have so much to offer given my experiences in life and in prison.

Due to the low yearly approval rating for compassionate release cases, like mine, I may never be released, despite providing positive reference letters from correctional officers, community religious leaders, certificates of completion for various programs, and a home plan for my release. Something must be done to simplify this process to allow for the release of inmates in my situation. For these reasons I ask you to issue a favorable report on HB 0157. Thank you.