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Testimony of Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel
Office of Chief Public Defender

Judiciary Committee - March 22, 2021

R.B. 1058 - An Act Concerning Compassionate Parole Release by the Board of Pardons and Paroles and Concerning Staff of the Department of Correction

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports *Raised Bill 1058, An Act Concerning Compassionate Parole Release by the Board of Pardons and Paroles and Concerning Staff of the Department of Correction*. The current statutory framework makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to provide for the compassionate parole release of medically vulnerable and low-risk inmates. This problem has become abundantly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. Applications for compassionate parole were denied, keeping medically vulnerable or fragile inmates confined.

Discussions with the Board of Pardons and Paroles have amplified the necessity for a statutory change to allow for a statute that is workable. A pandemic such as COVID-19, a major disaster, or "any other disease epidemic or public health emergency or a natural disaster" could necessitate the release of certain inmates now and in the future. While this bill does not provide for an automatic release under such circumstances, it provides an inmate the opportunity to apply for compassionate release. Pursuant to the bill, the Board of Pardons and Paroles would consider not only the reduced risk of danger the inmate presents to society if released, but also the higher risk of harm to the inmate if he/she remained incarcerated.

The Office of Chief Public Defender thanks the Committee for raising this very important bill and requests that it receive a joint favorable vote.