

SENATE No. 1535

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Patricia D. Jehlen

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act to ensure access to medical parole.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
<i>Patricia D. Jehlen</i>	<i>Second Middlesex</i>	
<i>Liz Miranda</i>	<i>Second Suffolk</i>	<i>1/20/2023</i>
<i>Mindy Domb</i>	<i>3rd Hampshire</i>	<i>1/25/2023</i>
<i>Joanne M. Comerford</i>	<i>Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester</i>	<i>2/9/2023</i>
<i>Rebecca L. Rausch</i>	<i>Norfolk, Worcester and Middlesex</i>	<i>2/23/2023</i>
<i>Lydia Edwards</i>	<i>Third Suffolk</i>	<i>3/30/2023</i>
<i>Sal N. DiDomenico</i>	<i>Middlesex and Suffolk</i>	<i>6/27/2023</i>
<i>Adam Gomez</i>	<i>Hampden</i>	<i>9/25/2023</i>
<i>Vanna Howard</i>	<i>17th Middlesex</i>	<i>12/7/2023</i>
<i>Danillo A. Sena</i>	<i>37th Middlesex</i>	<i>3/14/2024</i>

SENATE No. 1535

By Ms. Jehlen, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1535) of Patricia D. Jehlen, Liz Miranda, Mindy Domb, Joanne M. Comerford and others for legislation to remove barriers to medical parole. Public Safety and Homeland Security.

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE SENATE, NO. 1599 OF 2021-2022.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)**

An Act to ensure access to medical parole.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 119A of Chapter 127 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is
2 hereby amended by striking out the definitions of “Permanent incapacitation” and “Terminal
3 illness” in subsection (a) and replacing with the following:

4 "Permanent incapacitation", a medical determination of a physical or cognitive
5 incapacitation that appears irreversible, as determined by a licensed physician.

6 "Terminal illness", a medical determination of a condition that appears incurable, as
7 determined by a licensed physician that will likely cause the death of the prisoner in not more
8 than 18 months.

9 SECTION 2. Section 119A is further amended by adding the following definition after
10 “Secretary”:

11 “Surrogate decision-maker”, a person chosen by an incarcerated person to advocate on
12 their behalf. Such a surrogate may include next-of-kin, close family member, attorney, health
13 care proxy, or an individual with power of attorney for the incarcerated person.

14 SECTION 3. Section 119A is further amended by striking subsection (c) and inserting the
15 following subsections:

16 (c)(1) The superintendent of a correctional facility shall consider a prisoner for medical
17 parole upon a written petition by the prisoner, the prisoner's attorney, the prisoner's next of kin, a
18 medical provider of the correctional facility or a member of the department's staff. The
19 superintendent shall review the petition and develop a recommendation as to the release of the
20 prisoner. Whether or not the superintendent recommends in favor of medical parole, the
21 superintendent shall, not more than 21 days after the Department’s receipt of the petition,
22 transmit the petition and the recommendation to the commissioner. The superintendent shall
23 transmit with the recommendation: (i) a proposed medical parole plan; (ii) a written diagnosis by
24 a physician licensed to practice medicine under section 2 of chapter 112; and (iii) an assessment
25 of the current risk for violence that the prisoner poses to society. The risk assessment shall be
26 based on consideration of the prisoner’s current cognitive and physical ability to violently
27 recidivate, considering the probability that violence will actually occur, in light of the person’s
28 documented current medical condition. Where the person's disability-related behaviors contribute
29 to current risk, the Department must also consider whether reasonable accommodations such as
30 individualized treatment and programming in a community setting could mitigate risk. Such

31 assessment shall be supported, if requested by the petitioner, by routine video surveillance of the
32 prisoner from the prison, demonstrating the prisoner's level of incapacity.

33 (c)(2) The Department shall submit written petitions on behalf of permanently
34 cognitively incapacitated prisoners. The Department must first contact the prisoner's next of kin,
35 surrogate decision-maker, attorney or Prisoners' Legal Services, and notify them of the
36 opportunity to file a petition in lieu of the Department. The Department's obligation to submit
37 written petitions on behalf of cognitively incapacitated prisoners does not preclude other
38 appropriate parties from filing petitions on behalf of incarcerated persons with cognitive
39 incapacitation. The Department shall accept release of information forms signed by the prisoner
40 if no guardian has already been appointed.

41 (c)(3) The Department shall identify prisoners who are cognitively incapacitated through
42 at least annual administration of a standardized cognitive assessment tool to all prisoners aged 55
43 and older. The Department shall identify all prisoners screening positive for cognitive
44 impairment or who are terminally ill or physically incapacitated in a quarterly report to an
45 appropriate prisoners' rights legal organization, which will include the prisoner's name, the
46 prisoner's next-of-kin or surrogate decision-maker, information about the prisoner's sentence,
47 and the relevant condition or description of the incapacitation. In addition to the regular
48 assessments by medical personnel at the prison, the prisoner, or the prisoner's family or attorney
49 may request at any time that the prisoner's primary care physician in the prison assess cognitive
50 capacity.

51 (c)(4) Upon the commissioner's receipt of the petition and recommendation pursuant to
52 paragraph (1), the commissioner shall notify, in writing, the district attorney for the jurisdiction

53 where the offense resulting in the prisoner being committed to the correctional facility occurred,
54 the prisoner, the person who petitioned for medical parole, if not the prisoner and, if applicable
55 under chapter 258B, the victim or the victim's family that the prisoner is being considered for
56 medical parole. The parties who receive the notice shall have an opportunity to provide written
57 statements; provided, however, that if the prisoner was convicted and is serving a sentence under
58 section 1 of chapter 265, the district attorney or victim's family may request a hearing.

59 Where the prisoner meets the medical criteria for medical parole, the Department must
60 submit a medical parole plan meeting the prisoner's needs to the Parole Board no later than 35
61 days after the Department's receipt of the petition. Where a parole plan to a private home
62 appropriate to the person's care is available, that home shall be the proposed plan unless the
63 Department produces documentation of specific reasons the home placement would cause a risk
64 to public safety.

65 SECTION 4. Section 119A is further amended by striking subsection (d) and replacing
66 with the following subsections:

67 (d)(1) A sheriff shall consider a prisoner for medical parole upon a written petition filed
68 by the prisoner, the prisoner's attorney, the prisoner's next of kin, a medical provider of the house
69 of correction or jail or a member of the sheriff's staff. The sheriff shall review the request and
70 develop a recommendation as to the release of the prisoner. Whether or not the sheriff
71 recommends in favor of medical parole, the sheriff shall, not more than 21 days after the
72 Department's receipt of the petition, transmit the petition and the recommendation to the
73 commissioner. The sheriff shall transmit with the petition: (i) a proposed medical parole plan; (ii)
74 a written diagnosis by a physician licensed to practice medicine under section 2 of chapter 112;

75 and (iii) an assessment of the current risk for violence that the prisoner poses to society. The risk
76 assessment shall be based on consideration of the prisoner's current cognitive and physical
77 ability to violently recidivate, and the probability that violence will actually occur, in light of the
78 person's documented current medical condition. When the person's disability-related behaviors
79 contribute to current risk, the Department must also consider whether reasonable
80 accommodations such as individualized treatment and programming in a community setting
81 could mitigate risk. Such assessment shall be supported, if requested by the petitioner, by routine
82 video surveillance of the prisoner from the jail, demonstrating the prisoner's level of incapacity.

83 (d)(2) The sheriff shall submit written petitions on behalf of permanently cognitively
84 incapacitated prisoners. The sheriff must contact the prisoner's next of kin, surrogate decision-
85 maker, attorney or Prisoners' Legal Services, and notify them of the opportunity to file a petition
86 in lieu of the sheriff. The Sheriff's obligation to submit written petitions on behalf of cognitively
87 incapacitated prisoners does not preclude other appropriate parties from filing written petitions
88 on behalf of incarcerated persons with cognitive incapacitation. The sheriff shall accept release
89 of information forms signed by the prisoner if no guardian has already been appointed.

90 (d)(3) The sheriff shall identify prisoners who are cognitively incapacitated through at
91 least annual administration of a standardized cognitive assessment tool to all prisoners aged 55
92 and older. The sheriff shall identify all prisoners screening positive for cognitive impairment or
93 who are terminally ill or physically incapacitated in a quarterly report to an appropriate
94 prisoners' rights legal organization, which will include the prisoner's name, the prisoner's next-
95 of-kin or surrogate decision-maker, information about the prisoner's sentence, and the relevant
96 condition or description of the incapacitation. In addition to the regular assessments by medical

97 personnel at the prison, the prisoner, or the prisoner's family or attorney may request at any time
98 that the prisoner's primary care physician in the prison assess cognitive capacity.

99 (d)(4) Upon the commissioner's receipt of the petition and recommendation pursuant to
100 paragraph (1), the commissioner shall notify, in writing, the district attorney for the jurisdiction
101 where the offense resulting in the prisoner being committed to the correctional facility occurred,
102 the prisoner, the person who petitioned for medical parole, if not the prisoner and, if applicable
103 under chapter 258B, the victim or the victim's family that the prisoner is being considered for
104 medical parole. The parties who receive the notice shall have an opportunity to submit written
105 statements.

106 Where the prisoner meets the medical criteria for medical parole, the Department shall
107 submit a medical parole plan meeting the prisoner's needs to the Parole Board no later than 35
108 days after the sheriff's receipt of the petition. Where a medical parole plan to a private home
109 appropriate to the individual's care is available, that home shall be the proposed plan unless the
110 Department produces documentation of specific reasons the home placement would cause a risk
111 to public safety.

112 SECTION 5. Section 119A is further amended by striking subsection (e) and replacing
113 with the following:

114 (e) The commissioner shall issue a written decision not later than 45 days after the
115 Department's receipt of a petition, which shall be accompanied by a statement of reasons for the
116 commissioner's decision. The Department shall also establish a policy implementing a further
117 expedited process for decision and release of a person on medical parole whose death by
118 terminal illness is found to be likely in less than 6 months. Medical parole shall be granted to a

119 terminally ill or permanently incapacitated prisoner unless the Commissioner determines by clear
120 and convincing evidence that, if the prisoner is released with appropriate conditions, community
121 supervision, and reasonable accommodations, the prisoner will not live and remain at liberty
122 without violently recidivating. The assessment of terminal illness or permanent incapacitation by
123 a medical provider shall be separate from the public safety risk assessment. Any denial of
124 medical parole shall explain how the petitioner's release would be incompatible with the welfare
125 of society given the petitioner's current medical condition. No petition shall be denied on
126 medical grounds without a current, in-person evaluation of the prisoner by the licensed physician
127 opining that the person is not medically eligible. Petitioners shall have a right to funds for
128 experts pursuant to chapter 261. The parole board shall impose terms and conditions for medical
129 parole that shall apply through the date upon which the prisoner's sentence would have expired
130 and which shall be no more restrictive than the individual's current medical condition
131 necessitates.

132 All decisions to grant or deny medical parole, and the creation of a medical parole plan
133 shall be made without bias pertaining to a person's race, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexual
134 orientation, or gender identity.

135 Release after a grant of medical parole shall occur within 7 days of the grant, absent
136 documented extraordinary circumstances preventing such timely release. A prisoner for whom
137 the Department cannot identify appropriate post-release placement shall be referred to the
138 Department of Public Health ("DPH") for placement in an appropriate DPH facility pursuant to
139 section 151 of chapter 127. Not less than 24 hours before the date of a prisoner's release on
140 medical parole, the commissioner shall notify, in writing, the district attorney for the jurisdiction
141 where the offense resulting in the prisoner being committed to the correctional facility occurred,

142 the department of state police, the police department in the city or town in which the prisoner
143 shall reside and, if applicable under chapter 258B, the victim or the victim's family of the
144 prisoner's release and the terms and conditions of the release.

145 SECTION 6. Section 119A is further amended by striking subsection (f) and replacing
146 with the following:

147 (f) For all purposes, including revocation, a prisoner granted release under this section
148 shall be under the jurisdiction, supervision and control of the parole board, as if the prisoner had
149 been paroled pursuant to section 130 of chapter 127. The parole board may revise, alter or amend
150 the terms and conditions of a medical parole at any time.

151 If a parole officer receives credible information that the individual's terminal illness or
152 permanent incapacitation has improved to the extent that the individual would no longer be
153 eligible for medical parole under this section, the board shall obtain a medical assessment by a
154 licensed physician of the prisoner's current medical condition. If the medical assessment
155 concludes that the individual no longer qualifies for medical parole, the parole officer shall bring
156 the individual on medical parole before the board for a parole revocation hearing. The individual
157 shall remain at liberty during the pendency of the revocation proceedings, barring a substantial
158 and immediate risk to public safety. If the board establishes at the revocation hearing that the
159 terminal illness or permanent incapacitation has improved to the extent that the individual is no
160 longer eligible for medical parole pursuant to this section, the board shall order the return of the
161 individual to incarceration, or, subject to appropriate terms and conditions set by the board, order
162 release to parole supervision under another form of parole permitted by law.

163 If a parole officer receives credible information that an individual on medical parole has
164 failed to comply with a condition of medical parole, the parole officer may initiate parole
165 revocation proceedings. If the board established at the revocation hearing that the individual has
166 violated a condition of medical parole, it may revoke parole and order return of the individual to
167 incarceration, or order that the individual be reparaoled to the community on medical parole
168 subject to appropriate terms and conditions set by the board. In determining whether to order the
169 individual's return to custody, the board shall consider the medical hardship of incarceration and
170 whether provision of reasonable accommodations would enable the individual to comply with
171 the conditions of medical parole.

172 If the board orders revocation and reincarceration pursuant to this subsection, the prisoner
173 shall return to custody in accordance with the terms of their original sentence with credit given
174 only for the duration of the medical parole that was served in compliance with all conditions of
175 their medical parole pursuant to subsection (e). Revocation of a prisoner's medical parole for any
176 reason shall not preclude a prisoner's eligibility for medical parole in the future or for another
177 form of release permitted by law.

178 SECTION 7. Section 119A is further amended by striking subsection (g) and replacing
179 with the following:

180 (g) A prisoner, sheriff or superintendent aggrieved by a decision denying or granting
181 medical parole made under this section may petition for relief pursuant to section 4 of chapter
182 249.

183 A reviewing court may affirm or reverse the commissioner's decision and order grant or
184 denial of the prisoner's release. Petitions for certiorari shall be handled by the judiciary with due

185 haste considering the urgent nature of medical parole. A decision by the court affirming or
186 reversing the commissioner's grant or denial of medical parole shall not affect a prisoner's
187 eligibility for any other form of release permitted by law. A decision by the court pursuant to this
188 subsection shall not preclude a prisoner's eligibility for medical parole in the future.

189 SECTION 8. Section 119A is further amended by striking subsection (i) and replacing
190 with the following:

191 (i) The commissioner and the secretary shall file an annual report not later than March 1
192 with the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives, the senate and house committees
193 on ways and means and the joint committee on the judiciary detailing, for the prior year: (i) the
194 number of prisoners in the custody of the department or of the sheriffs who applied for medical
195 parole under this section and the race, ethnicity, and age of each applicant at the time of the
196 petition; (ii) the number of prisoners who have been granted medical parole and the race and
197 ethnicity, age of each prisoner at the time of the petition; (iii) the nature of the illness of the
198 applicants for medical parole; (iv) the counties to which the prisoners have been released; (v) the
199 number of prisoners who have been denied medical parole, the reason for the denial and the race,
200 ethnicity and age of each prisoner at the time of the petition; (vi) the number of prisoners who
201 have petitioned for medical parole more than once; (vii) the number of prisoners released who
202 have been returned to the custody of the department or the sheriff and the reason for each
203 prisoner's return; and (viii) the number of petitions for relief sought pursuant to subsection (g).
204 Nothing in this report shall include personally identifiable information of the prisoners.