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My husband is in his 15th year of incarceration. During that time, I've been involved in efforts to create a path to sentencing relief for him and others like him. I've tried to put a human face on those who are unable to appear before you themselves. I'm here today to continue those efforts.

I want to share with you a story from Southern State Correctional Facility. SSCF has the most equipped infirmary in the prison system, and it's where incarcerated men come to die. Wellpath, the health care provider that DOC contracts with, has brought in professionals to train a few residents in hospice care.

Late summer or early fall of last year, my husband Richard completed this training, along with four other peer mentors, called Open Ears coaches. Training took place over 3 days, meeting 4 hours a day.

Then, in December, a man was transferred to SSCF who was in the final days of his life. The five residents trained in hospice care were joined by one more man who had worked in hospice on the outside, and they set up plans for a vigil with the dying man. They created a schedule where there was always someone sitting with him, 24 hours a day. Eventually he became unresponsive, and still the vigilers sat. They continued this way for 9 days, until the man passed away on December 28, 2025. The man who died was 68 years old, serving a 40-year-to-life sentence.

After the death, a nurse and a corrections officer thanked the hospice team. There was no recognition from the administration of the facility; likely the superintendent knew nothing of it. But the men didn't vigil in order to receive kudos. They knew they had nothing to gain from what they did. But they knew it was the right thing to do. They did it out of kindness, out of empathy, and out of a sense of community.

The six caregivers and the man who died all might have benefited from this bill. They all are, or were, serving long sentences. Perhaps some of them might still benefit, and be able to re-enter our communities with the skills and desires to contribute. They, and many others, deserve a second look.