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Governor Fallin Commutes 21 People, Sending Them Home for the Holidays

*21 individuals set to be released later today mark first successful commutations from
campaign by Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform*

OKLAHOMA CITY – Gov. Mary Fallin today granted commutations to the first 21 applicants that reached her desk through a campaign led by Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR). The governor’s action is set to lead to the immediate release later today of these 21 individuals, who were serving excessive, decades-long prison sentences for low-level, mostly drug offenses that carry no prison terms or far shorter prison terms under current law. Upon release, the individuals will receive robust re-entry support and services coordinated by OCJR.

The 21 applicants had been sentenced to 349 years cumulatively, 306 years of which were commuted by the governor.

“This is a momentous day, as Governor Fallin cemented her legacy as a strong conservative leader on criminal justice reform in Oklahoma,” said Susan Esco, Board Member at OCJR. “We are immensely thankful to Governor Fallin, the Pardon and Parole Board, the families of these applicants and all the members of our coalition who stood up to help these Oklahomans. This is what true leadership, restorative justice and good government looks like.”

OCJR launched the commutation campaign to help correct unjust sentences and start a larger conversation about making SQ 780 retroactive in state law.

“We hope these 21 people are the first of many Oklahomans who receive retroactive relief under State Question 780. Making State Question 780 retroactive means more families reuniting, more people getting treatment instead of serving costly prison sentences, and more Oklahomans pursuing opportunities for success without the burden of a felony record,” Esco said.



The 21 individuals commuted to time served Wednesday are among the 46 applicants OCJR assisted with the help of the Tulsa County Public Defender's office and several University of Tulsa law students in an effort to reduce sentences that are out of step with voter approved reforms (SQ 780/781) passed in 2016 and legislative reforms passed earlier this year.

“By reducing simple possession of illegal drugs and low-level property crimes to misdemeanors, Oklahoma has taken an important step to reduce its unsustainable rate of incarceration. However, these reform measures apply only prospectively,” said John Estus, Chief of Staff at OCJR. “As a result, there are still thousands of Oklahomans serving long prison sentences for offenses the majority of Oklahomans say should be addressed as mental health or medical conditions and not with lengthy incarceration.”

In addition to pursuing commutations, OCJR also set up robust support networks in the community for these individuals, including treatment programs, counseling, job interview opportunities, housing, transportation and more. Re-entry service needs are being provided by organizations across the state, including Resonance Center for Women, Family & Children's Services, Bama Companies and Mental Health Association Oklahoma.

“We believe in restorative, smart justice and we thank the Governor for her continued leadership in this area by commuting the sentences of these individuals and setting them for release as early as today,” said Michael W. Brose, Chief Empowerment Officer of the Mental Health Association Oklahoma. “Our team looks forward to providing meaningful help to these individuals and many more Oklahomans in the future as they start new lives as a result of the Governor's actions today and recent criminal justice reforms.”

As these individuals are released, OCJR and its partners will provide continued support during their re-entry period.

“This campaign is a positive step toward continuing the important criminal justice reforms underway in our state,” said Rev. Shannon Fleck, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Conference of Churches. “It also promises to offer hope and a chance for redemption for these Oklahomans who have served excessive time for their mistakes. Through our network of faith communities, many religious leaders are available to be present alongside those who are given the opportunity to return to home and provide a positive interaction for those who seek our support.”

Going forward, OCJR is calling for retroactivity of SQ 780. Additionally, eight more commutation applicants OCJR has assisted will appear before the Pardon and Parole Board on Dec. 12. The board will decide whether to send their applications to the



governor for final approval. Fallin has said she wants to act on all items the board sends to her desk before her term ends next month.

“Today’s commutations were a big step forward, but there are eight more applicants on next week’s parole board docket who are just as deserving, plus thousands more Oklahomans serving lengthy sentences for drug possession who our elected leaders can help with a retroactivity bill,” Esco said. “We look forward to elected leaders taking up this pressing issue.”

About Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform

OCJR is a bipartisan coalition of community leaders and experts from across the state working to safely reduce incarceration, save taxpayer dollars, and make Oklahoma’s communities safer by addressing the root causes of crime. It is comprised of some of Oklahoma’s most prominent faith leaders, law enforcement, elected officials, health professionals, and business leaders. To learn more, visit <https://okjusticereform.org>.

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