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Comments to the Honorable Jason Pizzo, Chair, and Members of the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice Regarding SB 232 --- Criminal Justice

My name is Dominic M. Calabro and I am President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute & government watchdog which, for 40 years, has worked hard to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government and promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

One of the key provisions of SB 232 is the establishment of programs that would permit the conditional, supervised release of inmates with terminal medical conditions or who are suffering from severe debilitating or incapacitating medical, as well as low-risk, non-violent elderly inmates. Florida continues to bear the increasing medical and housing costs of a growing elderly prison population.

As prisoners age, they put a severe strain on the state budget, largely due to the high costs of providing health care to long-term, elderly, and infirmed inmates. A September 2014 Florida TaxWatch report entitled *Florida's Aging Prisoner Problem* points out that Florida's population of elderly inmates is growing at a rate that is three times the rate of the general prison population. Many of these elderly inmates were originally incarcerated for a non-violent primary offense and would pose little if any risk to the public if they were released from prison.

Elderly prisoners cost the most to incarcerate but pose the least danger to public safety. The National Institute of Corrections estimates that states spend on average \$70,000 per year to incarcerate someone age 50 or older, nearly three times what it costs to house a younger prisoner, largely because of the difference in healthcare costs. Elderly inmates are not eligible for federal healthcare support; however, they are eligible for federally funded Medicaid (with state match) and/or Medicare upon their release.

In its June 2016 *Final Report*, the constitutionally mandated Government Efficiency Task Force recommended the Florida Commission on Offender Review amend its release eligibility standards to authorize the supervised release of certain non-violent elderly inmates. The Task Force estimated the supervised release of only those elderly inmates who are 70 years of age or older could result in estimated annual savings of \$75.5 million to \$79.9 million.

Florida TaxWatch supports the enactment of legislation to establish programs that would permit the conditional, supervised release of inmates with terminal medical conditions or who are suffering from severe debilitating or incapacitating medical, as well as low-risk, non-violent elderly inmates. Legislation such as SB 232 and HB __ can reduce the elderly prisoner population, saving taxpayers' hard-earned money without compromising the safety of Florida communities.