



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Baylee Lakey, Baylee.Lakey@gov.ok.gov or (405) 522-8878

OKLAHOMA PARDON AND PAROLE BOARD RECOMMENDS LARGEST SINGLE-DAY COMMUTATION IN U.S. HISTORY

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board voted unanimously Friday to recommend the sentences of 527 state inmates be commuted, the largest such action in state and national history. The office of Governor Kevin Stitt will process the recommendations by end of day Friday for final approval.

“This is a historical day for criminal justice reform in Oklahoma, as we send the largest single day commutation of sentences in our nation’s history to the governor’s desk,” said Steven Bickley, Executive Director of the Pardon and Parole Board. **“With this vote, we are fulfilling the will of Oklahomans. However, from day one, the goal of this project has been more than just the release of low level, non-violent offenders, but the successful reentry of these individuals back into society. It has been a moving experience to see our state and community partners help connect our inmates with the resources they need for a successful reentry and I thank Governor Stitt, DOC Director Scott Crow, and the many local nonprofits, churches, and job creators that stepped up to ensure these inmates have every opportunity for success.”**

“I applaud the Pardon and Parole Board’s dedication to fulfill the will of the people through the HB 1269 docket, giving hundreds of non-violent, low-level offenders an opportunity at a second chance,” said Governor Stitt. **“I also thank the Department of Corrections and the many non-profits who are stepping up and working hard to connect our inmates with the resources they need for a successful transition. This event is another mark on our historic timeline as we move the needle in criminal justice reform, and my administration remains committed to working with Oklahomans to pursue bold change that will offer our fellow citizens a second chance while also keeping our communities and streets safe.”**

Friday’s historic vote on the single-stage commutation docket is the result of months-long collaboration among numerous state entities, including Pardon and Parole, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, Office of Governor Kevin Stitt, Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma District Attorneys Council and Oklahoma Department of Public Safety.

The board considered 814 inmates’ cases during the special meeting which was held the first day HB 1269 took effect. The 2019 law enabled the Pardon and Parole Board to hold an accelerated single-stage commutation docket to review the sentences of inmates in prison for crimes which would no longer be considered felonies if charged today. In 2016, Oklahomans passed criminal justice reforms that made simple drug possession a misdemeanor and increased the felony dollar threshold from \$500 to \$1000 for felony property crimes.

The Board recommended to the Governor 527 inmates for commutation, 75% male and 25% female. Because 65 inmates have detainers, 462 inmates will be released on Monday, November 4. Of the inmates receiving a favorable recommendation: the average age was 39.7 years old, they had been incarcerated for the past three years, the recommendation was to commute 1,931 years resulting in inmates being released 1.34 years early on average. Had these inmates served their full uncommuted sentence, it could have cost the State of Oklahoma approximately \$11.9M for continued incarceration based upon the average costs.

In addition to the sheer number of inmates who received recommendations for commutation, this collaborative effort produced numerous other notable "firsts" in Oklahoma history.

With the leadership of the governor's office, Pardon and Parole, and dozens of nonprofits, Oklahoma Department of Corrections held its first ever transition fairs for inmates' at 28 facilities across the state. More than 200 people from 45 community partners, nonprofits, and state agencies attended. These fairs connected 781 inmates with the services they may need once released.

In another first, having done the necessary release work in advance, Oklahoma Department of Corrections will be ready to release the commuted inmates on Monday, November 4. ODOC expects to receive the signed commutation certificates from the governor's office Friday afternoon, thus enabling the facilities to work over the weekend processing the discharge paperwork, transferring inmates' trust account money to debit cards, and preparing the necessary inmate discharge medications.

Finally, in another first, ODOC was able to remove another major hurdle for many offenders as they return to society by arranging for recommended inmates to have a valid state-issued driver's license or state-issued ID prior to discharge. Removing this obstacle required through a massive coordinated work effort by ODOC staff and special grant funding from the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the Arnall Family Foundation, along with assistance from TEEM (The Education and Employment Ministry).

###