

# Equal Justice Initiative

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

**<https://eji.org/news/alabama-releases-terminally-ill-omar-rahman-under-new-medical-furlough-bill/>**

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06.03.09

The Alabama Department of Corrections granted its first medical furlough to Omar Rahman under a new law that allows for release of some geriatric, incapacitated, or terminally ill prisoners.

The Alabama Medical Furlough Act took effect on September 1, 2008, and permits release of inmates 55 years of age or older who suffer from a chronic debilitating or life-threatening infirmity or illness and pose no danger to themselves or to society.

Terminally ill inmates who have an incurable disease and are expected not to live more than a year, as well as inmates suffering from a permanent, irreversible physical or mental condition that prevents criminal or violent activity and requires assistance with daily living and health care, are eligible for release under the new law.

In December 2008, EJI assisted Omar Rahman, age 56, to petition the Department of Corrections for a medical furlough. Mr. Rahman was diagnosed in June 2008 with chronic Hepatitis C, which led to severe cirrhosis of the liver. As a result of complications from liver cirrhosis, Mr. Rahman developed terminal liver cancer. Doctors determined that his cancer was inoperable and gave him six to twelve months to live.

Mr. Rahman served over 26 years in prison without a single violent disciplinary incident, and had had no disciplinary infractions of any kind in over ten years. He was a tutor at the prison school and participated in the [Dhamma Brothers Project](#), a self-improvement initiative emphasizing spiritual exploration and meditation.

Medical furlough for geriatric, terminally ill inmates like Mr. Rahman who pose no danger to the community can help to ease crowding and financial pressures on the Department of Corrections, which faces rapidly escalating medical expenses as Alabamas prison population ages.

Mr. Rahman was released to the care of his family on April 21, 2009. Unfortunately, he died about 30 hours later.

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