



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Support – HB740

House Judiciary Committee, February 25, 2020

Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing - Direct Release

Testimony presented by the Rev. Dr. Diane Fadely

“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” (Hebrews 13:3)

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland supports HB740. In 2018, our National Church passed a resolution condemning prolonged isolation as a form of torture. By definition, restrictive housing is any form of separation in which the person incarcerated is placed in a locked room or cell alone or with another person for 22 hours or more during a 24-hour period. The *FY18 MD Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Report on Restrictive Housing* states that Maryland inmates were held in restrictive housing for an average of 45.6 days in 2018.

Living in restrictive housing prevents inmates from having normal, barrier-free contact with others and denies them access to programs offered to the general population. As a result, they are deprived of opportunities to interact meaningfully with other people and lack exposure to mental stimulation, including learning opportunities. Research shows that social isolation and lack of sensory and cognitive stimulation for extended periods of time take a heavy toll on inmates physically, psychologically, and socially. Side effects of isolation include decreased appetite, heart palpitations with a sense of emotional breakdown, sleep disturbances, irritability and aggression, paranoia and violent fantasies, cognitive dysfunction, social withdrawal, and a host of other serious behavioral and emotional dysfunctions.

In 2018, 287 inmates were released from restrictive housing directly into the community without preparation to meet the emotional, behavioral, social, financial, and other demands of living in society. The lack of an individualized pre-release transition program for each inmate before they return to the community is a recipe for failure and re-offending and places the released person and everyone in their sphere at risk.

The pre-release planning, programs, services, and other safeguards contained in HB740 are designed to create a crucial safety net for people reentering society. If adopted, this bill will enable their families and the entire community to share in the benefits of this proactive and humane approach to reincorporating persons with a history of restrictive housing.

The Episcopal Church teaches seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being, including those who are incarcerated. These deeply-held beliefs lead us to respectfully ask you to show strong support for HB740.

Prisoners with severe mental illness are at high risk for their symptoms to worsen in isolation. Many have developed psychoses, severe depression, clinical levels of anxiety, self-injurious behavior, extreme withdrawal, and suicidal ideation that leads to suicide at a rate of five times that of the general population.

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Greetings, Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is the Rev. Dr. Diane Fadely and I am a member of the Legislative Team of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. Our Diocese strongly supports HB740.