

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 742  
Serious Mental Illness- Prohibited Placement**

**House Judiciary Committee  
February 25, 2020**

The Maryland chapter of the National Association of Social Workers supports House Bill 742. NASW-MD represents thousands of the social workers in Maryland who have dedicated their careers to assisting some of the most vulnerable Marylanders. Our members work in corrections, mental health, social services, education, state and local government, private practice, aging, housing, employment and more. The social work profession is the largest provider of mental health services nationwide.

HB 742 is an important bill prohibiting a state facility from placing inmates with serious mental illness in restrictive housing unless certain conditions are met.

It is clear to social workers across the state that both the isolation and the conditions of solitary confinement are traumatic. There have been a number of studies which show that prolonged isolation in excess of 15 days is hazardous to the mental health of ANY inmate. Beyond the trauma of solitary confinement, human connection and healthy relationships are key to mental health and social functioning. Isolating individuals does not improve their ability to relate positively to others and indeed is a significant detriment to those skills. Research shows that suicide rates and incidents of self-harm (such as banging one's head against the cell wall) are much higher for people in segregation than those in the general prison population. For inmates who are already suffering from serious mental illness the consequences are even more extreme.

A punitive response toward a person who is suffering from an illness does not make any sense and certainly is not going to make the situation better. Except for the very limited circumstances outlined in this legislation, we beg our correctional system to find some more humane alternative for dealing with the mentally ill who are incarcerated.

NASW- Maryland calls on lawmakers to pass this critical piece of legislation immediately. Please vote YES on HB 742.