



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Support – HB742

Corrections - Restrictive Housing - Serious Mental Illness – Assessments
(Restrictive Housing Reform Act)
House Judiciary Committee, February 25, 2020

Written testimony submitted by the Rev. Dr. Diane Fadely

. . . 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40)

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland supports HB742. 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.

Research shows that social isolation and lack of sensory and cognitive stimulation for extended periods of time take a heavy toll on even the most physically and mentally healthy. If prisoners of war kept in solitary confinement returned home with serious physical and mental injury, it is not surprising that inmates with serious mental illness are at very high risk for devastating decline if placed in isolation. Instead of exacerbating their mental illness, it is far more humane to give them the mental health treatment they need in environments appropriate for persons with mental illness rather than holding them in 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. These deeply-held beliefs lead us to respectfully ask you to show strong support for HB742.

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