

**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee**  
**March 2, 2021**  
**HB 917 - Corrections – Restrictive Housing – Prohibition**

**FAVORABLE**

To Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and honorable Committee members,

My name is Onyinye Alheri, a resident in Maryland's 40th Legislative district and graduate student at the UMB School of Social Work. I am writing to urge the House Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 917 and eliminate the use of restrictive housing, otherwise known as solitary confinement, in Maryland.

Incarceration is itself a traumatic experience, made worse for many who experience solitary confinement. The practice is cruel, inhumane, and comparable to torture. There is a growing number of research<sup>1</sup> which demonstrates just how psychologically and neurologically damaging this practice is.

The mental health consequences during and following release from forced isolation are long lasting, sometimes lifelong. These include auditory and visual hallucinations, depression, severe anxiety, mood deterioration & dysregulation, emotional numbing, cognitive impairments, and false perceptions of time. In addition, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated survivors of solitary experience relational estrangement with family, friends and other loved ones.

There are no documented benefits to the use of solitary confinement. What sort of rehabilitation is expected from isolating a person who is already cut off from their society and community? The practice reflects a serious abuse of power by the state over those who have already been stripped of their rights. I urge you to move away from this torturous practice and humanize the incarcerated.

A special "thank you" to Delegate Amprey for your transformative work to bring true justice to those involved in the criminal legal system.

Best,

Onyinye Alheri  
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<sup>1</sup> Brunner, J., Joseff, K., Matlow, R., Rahter, J., Reicherter, D., & Van Schaack, B. *Mental Health Consequences Following Release from Long-Term Solitary Confinement in California*. CCR Justice. Retrieved from [https://ccrjustice.org/sites/default/files/attach/2018/04/CCR\\_StanfordLab-SHURreport.pdf](https://ccrjustice.org/sites/default/files/attach/2018/04/CCR_StanfordLab-SHURreport.pdf).