

Support SB1085/HB1144 – Limit Use of Restrictive Housing

Homewood Friends Meeting (Religious Society of Friends)
3117 N. Charles Street, Baltimore MD 20218

March 5, 2024

To: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., and Distinguished Members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Homewood Friends Meeting (Quaker) in Baltimore, writes to join the voices of innumerable other Marylanders in strong support of [SB1085/HB1144](#) during the current Maryland legislative session. These are identical, cross-filed bills aimed at restricting the use of solitary confinement in Maryland's state-run correctional facilities. The brutality and persistent harms of solitary confinement cannot be overstated, for individuals, families, the communities to which confined persons return, and to the moral and financial costs to the State of Maryland.

Quakers are often 'credited' with introducing solitary confinement to the US in the late 1700s with the thought that time spent alone in contemplation would give convicts an opportunity to consider their sins and repent (hence the term "penitentiary"). However, Quakers quickly learned this was a grave mistake, and have opposed the use of solitary confinement by any name, since the 1800s. Over time, it became clear that forced isolation, particularly for weeks, months and years as occurs in Maryland, causes or exacerbates mental illness. In addition, enforced idleness is physically debilitating, and undermines any preparation for re-entry to society. Because it is harmful and not corrective,

It is imperative to appreciate that the horrors of solitary confinement are never imposed by a judge as part of a person's sentence. It is extra-judicial. Solitary (or restrictive housing, as it is called in Maryland) is often an ad hoc decision within a facility with little oversight and no real appeal, often for pretty minor things. Certainly the harms of solitary are profoundly disproportionate – and morally and legally objectionable.

Isolated Persons Suffer. It is well documented that Incarcerated persons placed in restrictive housing suffer physical and psychological harms, such as psychosis, trauma, severe depression, serious self injury, or suicide.

Families Suffer. Individuals in restrictive housing are generally denied visits and calls from family. This breaks down the family ties that are crucial to supporting people upon re-entry.

Communities Are NOT Safer. Research shows that time spent in solitary may increase people's likelihood of post-release offending, especially violent re-offending. This is made still worse when incarcerated people are released directly from restrictive housing into the community. Thus as practiced in Maryland, solitary causes more harm than it prevents to public safety.

Solitary Confinement Costs the State More. We are impressed by the research gathered by Interfaith Action for Human Rights from other states that restricting the use of solitary saves money (citing studies from Mississippi, Illinois and California).

Homewood Quaker Meeting urges the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to support HB1144/SB1085.

Sincerely,

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Sarah Bur, Clerk