

March 5, 2024

To: Members of the Maryland State Judiciary Committee
From: Suzanne O'Hatnick
Re: SUPPORT for HB1144

Dear Committee Chairman Clippinger and Committee Members,

I urge your support for HB1144 Corrections - Segregated Housing -Limitations.

And I have good news for you, too! Virginia just today passed similar legislation in both their House and Senate, and it is on its way to the Governor's office.

It is no secret that prolonged isolation by any name can be and often is mentally destabilizing. In the public arena we call it solitary confinement. As a Quaker I should know. Quakers started the practice in the late 1700s, then realized that forced isolation, unlike voluntary meditation, causes profound mental instability, and have been opposed at least since the early 1800s. It really is time to stop this practice which, when imposed for more than 15 days, has been declared by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to be torture.

In the last report by DPSCS, from 2022 (by the way, they are late with the 2023 report), 25.8% of persons incarcerated in state prisons spent an average of 42.5 days in solitary. 95% of those imprisoned are released into the community, some, directly from solitary. How we treat those who are imprisoned will affect them - and us - for the rest of their lives.

The nine states that have sharply reduced the use of solitary confinement have found that isolation did not decrease violence in prisons, and releasing prisoners from solitary confinement did not increase violence. Additionally, States have saved considerable sums of money, especially over time, by reducing its use.

It makes sense and is the right thing to do: please give your full support to HB1144.

Thank you,

Suzanne Hubbard O'Hatnick
Co-Founder, Interfaith Action for Human Rights
Member, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform
Member, Stony Run Friends Meeting, Baltimore (Quaker)

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