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**Testimony in Support of HB1144
Correctional Services - Segregated Housing - Limitations**

TO: Chairman Luke Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Carol Stern

I am testifying in favor of HB1144 as a resident of Montgomery County's District 16 and a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue.

There are two Jewish texts that shape my religious and moral abhorrence of solitary confinement in general, and especially related to juveniles. In Genesis Chapter 1, we learn that **the human is created in God's image - *B'tselem Elohim*. We all contain the divine spark, and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. This applies to all people, whether they are incarcerated or not.**

The second text is in Genesis Chapter 2, where we learn that **"It is not good for the human to be alone."** This is a powerful statement about our need to be nurtured by others at all times in our life but, I would add, especially for juveniles, who are immature and needy human beings. It is never good to be away from the nurturing company of other people, but **juveniles should not be alone during the difficult time of incarceration.** These two verses inspire the spiritual and moral imperative to work for changes to solitary confinement laws.

Maryland had not shared information on its practices regarding solitary confinement so it had been difficult to determine the extent of the problem. In 2016, legislation passed requiring annual reporting on who was isolated and for how long. But, the last substantive report was for fiscal year 2018. It revealed that 50% of those in prison are placed in solitary, and the average length of confinement is anywhere from 43 to 51 days.

Solitary confinement is an archaic practice that should be ended and has been proven to be detrimental to adolescents who are especially susceptible to the toxic nature of this restrictive housing. I know that if my children or grandchildren were exposed to extreme idleness, sensory deprivation, and lack of human interaction, they would suffer lasting physical and emotional damage. I support this bill which would cap the use of restrictive housing to 15 days, prohibit vulnerable inmates from its use severely limits the practice for juveniles, and mandates that those put in restrictive housing be allowed to contest the confinement. In addition, the training requirements are crucial to assure that the guards and staff understand the new law and its requirements. This bill is one step toward treating incarcerated Marylanders with the dignity and respect that all people deserve.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for HB1144.