

Support HB1144 and SB1085 - end prolonged isolation in Maryland State Prisons.



March 5, 2024

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

Quaker Voice of Maryland (QVM) strongly **support** the passage 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.

Quaker Voice of Maryland, formed in 2019, helps Maryland Quakers have an effective voice in statewide policy decisions on issues of concern to them. Quaker Voice of MD supports HB740. It was Quakers who introduced solitary confinement in the late 1700s with the thought that time spent alone in contemplation would give convicts an opportunity to consider their sins and repent. However, Quakers have been opposed to 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. 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.

- **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 Made 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.** Quaker Voice is impressed by the research developed by the Interfaith Action for Human Rights from other states that restricting the use of solitary saves money (citing studies from Mississippi, Illinois and California).

Quaker Voice of Maryland urges the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to support HB1144/SB1085.

Sincerely,

Support *HB1144* and *SB1085* - end prolonged isolation in Maryland State Prisons.

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