

February 24, 2025

Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and members
of the Judiciary Proceedings Committee

RE: TESTIMONY ON HB 647 – In Favor

Restrictive Housing Limitations

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and members of the Judiciary Proceedings

My name is Pastor Zacharias. As a member of the faith community and Executive Director of The Interfaith Action for Human Rights, I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB 647, which aims to place restrictions on the use of restrictive housing in Maryland jails and prisons.

My support for this bill is based on its restorative justice aspects, which allow incarcerated persons to amend, heal, and work towards reintegration into society. I believe that with the proper wrap-around services—spiritual, emotional, physical, and social support-incarcerated individuals can become better persons and citizens.

Studies have shown that prolonged solitary confinement causes mental trauma, heightening the torture and unfair treatment experienced by incarcerated persons. Solitary confinement for fifteen days or longer is considered torture and results in immediate and permanent long-term effects on the psyche of incarcerated individuals. I support a limit of no more than twenty days in a sixty-day period.

Unfortunately, restrictive housing has not been favorable to any incarcerated person and deprives them of various human rights and respectable treatment.

This is especially true in Maryland, where the use of restrictive housing is among the worst in the country. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services has hidden its practices for the past two years. The annual reports, required to be issued by the end of each calendar year for the preceding fiscal year, have not been issued for 2023 or 2024.

The fiscal year 2022 report shows that Maryland overuses restrictive housing, with an average stay of 42.5 days. With the help of the Maryland legislature, a move to lessen this crisis will go a long way.

Thank you for your attention. I hope your actions will be favorable on HB 647.

Rev. Dr. Christopher L. Zacharias,



Executive Director
revchristopher@interfaithactionhr.org