



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 647- Correctional Services- Restrictive Housing

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark, Criminal Justice Lead Advocate
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Restrictive Housing, formally known as Solitary Confinement, continues to be a familiar topic in our General Assembly. This bill, **HB 647- Correctional Services- Restrictive Housing**, builds on previous legislation, while integrating newer research to help reform this issue. This bill could serve as a manual entitled “A Humane and Effective Treatment for Restrictive Housing!”

Instead of being a warehouse for lost causes, our policies should answer the question: “How do we deal with creating a safe and motivating environment within our prisons, while some individuals are dealing with trauma, mental health, and other conditions?” Our goal should be to create an environment for reflection, re-evaluation, and reinvestment in a brighter future to reduce recidivism.

One challenging issue is how to humanely treat a pregnant incarcerated person. Several years ago, they would have been restricted to their cell for the last 3 months of their term. This bill includes detailed care management policies to clarify what—and how— additional treatment would be provided. The goal would be for their treatment to reflect the “normal care” they would have received on the outside. This bill would require that special caregivers handle needs that could arise—like possible exposure to disease, etc.

In addition, this bill would institute policies for juveniles that would relate to their age and needs. They would remain in a normal prison environment, unless there is convincing evidence of personal harm to the juvenile or others. While in restrictive housing, juveniles would receive DAILY mental and physical assessments to evaluate when the juvenile would be ready to return to their normal prison environment.

While in restrictive housing, both pregnant people and juveniles would have the same access benefits others enjoy within the system, like phone calls, visits, mail, etc.

The bill also defines and lists eight “Prohibited Acts,” such as extorting another by force—or threat of force—for money or property, which would put those responsible into restrictive housing.

This bill would prohibit an individual from being kept in restrictive housing longer than 15 consecutive days, which aligns with the United Nations limits for torture.

No more horror stories of people being kept in solitary for months or more.

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The details in this bill are too massive to list, but its coverage is impressive—and needed—to advance a humane and effective Restrictive Housing policy. Consequently, the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland is asking for a favorable report on **HB 647**.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Clark

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