

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON HB 647 POSITION: FAVORABLE
Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett , and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin.. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 647, Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing

I've lived in Montgomery County for the past 10 years. As a Jew, I believe in *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world. I also believe in *K'vod HaB'riot*, the dignity of every human being. I believe in Tzedakah and *G'milut Chasadim*, practicing charity and performing acts of human kindness. All of these Jewish values inform my feelings about Restrictive Housing.

Solitary confinement, or restrictive housing as it is known in Maryland, is a form of torture. This is not solely in my view, as someone with a graduate degree in public health, but also in the view of many mental health professionals, and even in the view of the United Nations. It is detrimental to both mental and physical health. In recent history, Maryland has had a terrible record of placing incarcerated people in restrictive housing for weeks, months, and even years at a time. The cells in restrictive housing are about the size of a single parking space, and often people have been housed this way for 22 or more hours per day. Unfortunately, restrictive housing is not just used for the purpose of punishing offending individuals, it is also used for administrative reasons, such as a facility being under-staffed.

This bill will limit the amount of time someone may be placed in restrictive housing to no more than 17 hours per day, no more than 15 consecutive days, and no more than 20 days in any 2 month period. It will also prohibit the use of restrictive housing on vulnerable populations, such as pregnant individuals, those 21 years old and younger, people 55 and older, those with developmental disabilities and/or psychiatric illness, and others. Additionally, this bill provides a process of reviewing those in restrictive housing and documenting the review. All of these features, if enacted, will protect all incarcerated individuals and especially those who are vulnerable.

If well implemented, this bill will limit the use of restrictive housing, which will prevent physical and mental harm to those incarcerated.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB 647.