

Date of Hearing: March 7, 2024

Seekers Church

276 Carroll St NW, Washington, DC 20012

TESTIMONY ON HB 647 (FAVORABLE)
Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing

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

FROM: The Racial and Ethnic Justice Ministry Team of Seekers Church, a non-denominational Christian church

Most members of Seekers Church are residents of the State of Maryland and live in legislative districts 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 26. We are testifying in support of HB 647.

Solitary confinement (“restrictive housing”) lasting more than 15 consecutive days is recognized as torture by the United Nations and numerous countries around the world. It is dehumanizing, life-threatening, and causes physical and mental suffering. It destroys human dignity and violates basic human rights. As followers of Jesus, we are called to love our neighbors and to see all human beings as valued children of God. Solitary confinement is an act of violence and a flagrant violation of God’s call to heal and care-for rather than to harm.

Moreover, from a purely practical perspective, solitary does not work. It does nothing to reduce violence in the facility. It hinders rehabilitation and increases recidivism. It puts prisoners, families and communities at risk. And it costs Maryland more to segregate people than to keep them in the general population.

We are particularly aggrieved by the infamous fact that Maryland incarcerates the highest percentage of Black people in the country – 71 percent of our prison population – more than twice the national average – and appallingly, leads the nation in sentencing young Black men to the longest prison terms, at a rate 25 percent higher than the next nearest state, Mississippi. Legislating limitations on “restrictive housing” is one modest step by which Maryland can begin to address this shameful bias against Black and Brown people in our state.

We call for strict limitations on the use of solitary confinement/ “restrictive housing” and we call for it to be abolished for vulnerable people. **The Racial and Ethnic Justice Ministry Team of Seekers Church urges a favorable report on HB 647.**