

N. SCOTT PHILLIPS, Esq.  
Legislative District 10  
Baltimore County  

---

Judiciary Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 319  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3358 · 301-858-3358  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3358  
N.Scott.Phillips@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2025

**Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,**

I am here today to request a favorable report on **HB 647**, a bill aimed at reforming the use of restrictive housing—commonly known as solitary confinement—in our state’s correctional facilities. Over the years, the use of restrictive housing has escalated dramatically, and the time has come to take action to address the growing concerns surrounding this practice.

In 2022, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) reported nearly **12,000 placements** in restrictive housing. The average length of stay for individuals in these units was **42.5 days** per year. These numbers underscore the scale of the problem we are facing. As a system that is supposed to rehabilitate, not merely punish, we must do better.

My commitment to reforming Maryland’s correctional system, which is long overdue for modernization, has made the issue of restrictive housing a top priority. This bill—**HB 647**, introduced alongside **SB 702**—represents a significant, yet measured step forward in making our correctional system safer, more humane, and more effective. Senator Sara Love, who shares my concerns about prison reform, and I worked together to craft a bill that takes the **first concrete steps** to narrow and reform the use of restrictive housing.

This bill includes several critical provisions that I believe will help bring us closer to a more just and effective correctional system:

1. **Clarifying the definition of restrictive housing** to ensure we are all on the same page about what constitutes this practice.
2. **Addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations**, such as individuals requiring medical or mental health care, by ensuring they are not placed in restrictive housing if they require specialized treatment.
3. **Establishing a list of “prohibitive acts”** that would clearly outline the behaviors warranting placement in restrictive housing—removing any ambiguity and ensuring that this practice is not used indiscriminately.
4. **Requiring annual reporting by DPSCS** on the use of restrictive housing, increasing transparency and accountability to ensure the system is being used appropriately.

5. **Limiting the duration of stays** in restrictive housing to no more than **15 consecutive days** and a total of **20 days in any 60-day period**, recognizing that prolonged isolation is harmful and ineffective.

We didn't develop this bill in isolation. We took the time to fully understand the current state of restrictive housing in Maryland. We visited facilities, spoke with wardens and senior administrators, and toured restrictive housing units at the **Maryland Correctional Facility in Jessup**. We also reached out to other states that have already implemented restrictive housing reforms. Through conversations with lawmakers and administrators in **New Jersey** and **New York**, we learned that **reform works**.

In these states, reforms have led to decreased violence, shorter stays in restrictive housing, and cost savings. These outcomes are not coincidental. By reducing the length of time individuals spend in restrictive housing and offering incentives for good behavior, states have seen **improvements in safety** for both inmates and staff, as well as **reduced costs**. These are all outcomes we can—and should—strive for here in Maryland.

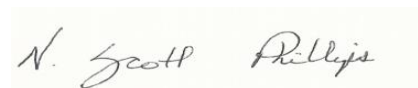
I am aware that the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services has expressed concern about the **costs of reform**, citing an estimated \$53 million in 2026 to hire additional prison staff, with other costs exceeding \$100 million. However, these figures do not account for the **long-term savings** that have been realized in states that have reformed their restrictive housing systems. Reducing the length of stay in restrictive housing not only improves the quality of life for inmates but also saves taxpayer money.

We also discovered that a significant number of individuals are placed in restrictive housing due to **mental health issues** that are left untreated. Solitary confinement is not an appropriate setting for individuals dealing with mental health conditions. Reforming our system will help ensure that individuals in need of treatment receive it in a more appropriate and effective environment.

In summary, this bill represents **a crucial first step** toward creating a more humane, fair, and efficient correctional system. By addressing the root causes of unnecessary confinement and limiting the use of restrictive housing, we can reduce harm to inmates, improve safety for staff, and ultimately create a more effective system of rehabilitation.

I urge you to support **HB 647**. The changes we are proposing are modest, but they will set us on a path toward the necessary transformation of Maryland's correctional system—one that is modern, just, and humane. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully and fraternally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "N. Scott Phillips". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

N. Scott Phillips, Esq.