

**Testimony, Written & Video, Maryland House Judicial Proceedings Committee,
February 26, 2026**

**Terry A. Kupers, M.D., M.S.P.
Professor, The Wright Institute**

Re: HB1154 - Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing - House Hearing

Hello. I am a forensic psychiatrist and Professor at The Wright Institute. I testify as an expert witness in lawsuits about jail and prison conditions and correctional mental health programs. I am the author of many professional articles as well as the books *Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars*, and *Solitary: The Inside Story of Supermax Isolation*. I strongly support HB 1154 about Restrictive Housing.

1. Solitary Confinement involves the housing of prisoners in a cell, alone or with a cellmate, for most of every day with little or no communication or contact with others except the brief moments when officers deliver a food tray through a slot in the cell door or accompany the prisoner to another location in the facility. Solitary confinement includes severe limitations on programs and activities, usually limited to showers and recreation in small enclosed spaces several hours each week.
2. While the United Nations and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care in the USA define solitary confinement as cell confinement for 22 or more hours per day, that definition is inadequate because it leaves too many prisoners alone in a cell and almost entirely idle for somewhat less than 22 hours per day, even though the harmful effects of solitary confinement are actually evidenced in prisoners housed alone in a cell for 17 or more hours per day. Professor Craig Haney comments: “From a psychological perspective, “solitary confinement is defined less by the exact amount of time during which prisoners are confined to their cells, than by the degree to which they are deprived of normal, direct, meaningful social contact and denied access to positive environmental stimulation and activity.” It is very important that HB 1154 reflects that 17 or more hours of cell-confinement per day constitutes solitary confinement and results in the well-researched harmful effects.

3. Solitary Confinement Causes Harm. In individuals who are emotionally stable upon entry into restrictive housing, likely symptoms include severe anxiety, disturbed cognition including paranoia, memory problems, trouble concentrating, mounting anger, despair and high risk of suicide, and so forth. In individuals with mental illness, there is exacerbation of the mental illness.
4. Solitary does not reduce prison violence. Research shows no decrease in violence with use of solitary confinement. In fact, when decreased use of solitary confinement is combined with adequate mental health treatment and general rehabilitation programming, the prevalence of violence in the entire prison system is decreased.
5. The people consigned to solitary are far from “the worst of the worst.” Many are there for minor offenses such as talking back to officers, or their mental illness prevented them from following rules.
6. The damage is lasting and includes:
 - ❖ For prisoners who are relatively stable, symptoms caused by solitary confinement included massive anxiety, thinking disturbances including paranoia, great trouble concentrating, memory deficits, despair, constant pacing or repetitive cell-cleaning, a shockingly high rate of suicide and self-harm.
 - ❖ For prisoners with serious mental illness, solitary confinement exacerbates the mental illness with worsening disability and prognosis.
 - ❖ Changes in the brain, which are long-lasting or permanent
 - ❖ Continuing severe symptoms long after release from solitary.
7. Everyone eventually gets out of solitary confinement. On average, individuals who have spent time in solitary have more trouble following rules after they are released from solitary, pent up anger gets them into

more fights, and they get into more trouble than before being consigned to solitary confinement.

8. Think about it, if one's social skills are decimated by a stint in solitary confinement, what position is one in to find peaceful, productive ways to settle disputes without lashing out?, and that is why prisoners leaving solitary get into even more trouble.
9. This explains why people who have been in Solitary Confinement later have worse recidivism rates, and even for formerly incarcerated folks who do not return to drugs or crime, there is a much-reduced quality of life.

This Bill is an important step in the right direction and I urge its passage.