

Hearing Date: February 26 at 1:00 PM

**Testimony on HB 1154 – Favorable
HB 1154 - Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing**

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr and Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

My name is Paul Holmes. I live in District 19, Silver Spring and offer this testimony **in support of HB 1154 - Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing**. This bill advances humane, evidence-based reforms that protect human dignity, improve safety, and promote rehabilitation within Maryland’s correctional system.

Restrictive housing (solitary confinement) inflicts severe physical, psychological, and social harm. The United Nations recognizes solitary beyond 15 consecutive days as torture. Maryland currently allows people to remain isolated for weeks or months with minimal out-of-cell time, contributing to depression, psychosis, self-harm, and suicide risk. Prolonged isolation also undermines institutional safety, increases recidivism, and wastes taxpayer dollars.

Marylanders 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 and responsible step by which Maryland can begin to address this shameful bias against Black and Brown people in our state.

HB 1154 improves the current situation in critically important ways. It caps restrictive housing at 15 consecutive days and 20 total days within any 60-day period, encouraging isolation to be used as a short-term, closely monitored intervention—not routine punishment. It guarantees at least four hours out-of-cell daily, including access to programming, treatment, recreation, and social interaction—essential elements for rehabilitation. It assures that vulnerable people – pregnant, minors and those with serious mental illness or intellectual/developmental disabilities are not placed in restrictive housing except under narrowly defined, monitored circumstances. And it requires documentation, review, and reporting on placements and encourages use of evidence-based behavioral interventions instead of isolation.

It is well documented that solitary confinement destroys dignity and mental health; does nothing to reduce violence or improve behavior; undermines public safety and successful

reentry; costs taxpayers much more than general population housing; and disproportionately harms Black and Brown Marylanders.

All Marylanders of faith and conscience reject practices that dehumanize. People in custody, regardless of offense, deserve compassion, dignity, and opportunities for transformation. HB 1154 helps align Maryland's corrections policy with those values. HB 1154 is a prudent, humane, evidence-based reform that balances institutional order with human rights by limiting isolation, guaranteeing meaningful daily engagement, protecting vulnerable individuals, and increasing oversight.

For these reasons, **I urge the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1154.**