

Testimony in Support of HB1154
Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Natasha White. I serve as the Director of Community Engagement at Interfaith Action for Human Rights, and I am a survivor of long-term isolation. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB1154.

HB1154 represents an important step toward ensuring that restrictive housing in Maryland is used sparingly, transparently, and in a manner consistent with human dignity and public safety. While this legislation may not resolve every concern related to isolation practices, it establishes meaningful guardrails that are urgently needed.

Prolonged solitary confinement has been widely documented to cause significant psychological and physical harm. Individuals subjected to extended isolation often experience anxiety, depression, hallucinations, cognitive decline, and increased risk of self-harm. The impact is particularly severe for people living with mental illness and developmental disabilities, who are disproportionately placed in restrictive housing settings.

As someone who endured years in isolation, I can attest that solitary confinement does not rehabilitate. It does not prepare individuals to safely return to their communities. Instead, it compounds trauma, erodes coping skills, and weakens the very stability that correctional systems claim to promote.

Maryland has an opportunity to lead by reinforcing limits on the use of restrictive housing, strengthening oversight, and prioritizing alternative approaches that promote safety and rehabilitation. Evidence-based correctional practices demonstrate that structured programming, mental health support, and step-down opportunities are far more effective in reducing violence and recidivism than prolonged isolation.

HB1154 promotes accountability and clearer standards. It reinforces the principle that restrictive housing should be a last resort, limited in duration, and subject to review. These are reasonable, balanced measures that align with best practices and national reform efforts.

This bill is about public safety. It is about fiscal responsibility. And it is about basic human dignity.

I respectfully urge the Committee to give HB1154 a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.