

Hearing: February 26, 2026
Jo Shifrin
Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON HB# 1154 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing

TO: Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr , and members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 1154, Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing.

I've been a resident of Montgomery County for the past 11 years. I try to live my life based on Jewish values. Among these values are *Tikkun Olam*, an obligation to make the world a more fair and equitable place for people to live; and *Dei Machsoro*, an obligation to make sure that everyone has what they need to live and thrive.

Restricted housing is what we call Solitary Confinement in Maryland. It is "...defined as physical isolation of a person in a cell for 22 to 24 hours per day without meaningful human contact."¹ It is a condition of extreme lack of sensory stimulation and social interaction. There is a growing consensus that restrictive housing or solitary confinement causes severe psychological and physiological damage due to isolation. 95% of incarcerated persons eventually are released from incarceration. Rather than reducing violence, prolonged stays in restrictive housing leads to people becoming more violent.

SB 908 is a good step toward mitigating the damage of restricted housing because it limits the time someone can spend in restrictive housing, requires more time outside of the cell for recreation, visits, use of the telephone, participation in work detail, programming, and classes, all of which provide social interaction. It also identifies vulnerable populations –pregnant people, those under 22 or over 55 years of age, those perceived as gay, bisexual, or transgender, etc.-- who should not be in restricted housing except for a limited number of reasons, and who should be frequently evaluated while there. Moreover, the bill calls for an ombudsperson to visit facilities, review the status of the legislation's implementation, and summarize the results in annual reports.

¹ "End Solitary Confinement: Legal Arguments and Reforms," LegalClarity, Dec. 13, 2025.

All of these are changes in the right direction. However, they are incremental and insufficient, because often people are placed in restricted housing because of staff shortages, or minor behavioral infractions.

Christine Montross, MD is a psychiatrist who wrote “Waiting for An Echo: The Madness of American Incarceration.” She has spent her career treating people who are incarcerated in the U.S. and researching the way other countries deal with those who are incarcerated. In the United States, the focus is on punishment, vengeance, and suffering, rather than treatment. In Norway and Sweden, if someone is incarcerated she found the facility does a needs assessment and provides treatment for drug abuse, marital problems, anger management, education and skill building.

Although Maryland’s prisons need much more reform than is offered by HB 1154, we need to move forward with whatever reforms we can manage. Therefore, **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB 1154.**