

February 24, 2026

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**Testimony in Support of SB908
Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing**

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

FROM: Carol Stern

I am testifying in favor of HB1154 as a resident of Montgomery County's District 16 and a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue.

There are two Jewish texts that shape my religious and moral abhorrence of solitary confinement in general, and especially related to juveniles. In Genesis Chapter 1, we learn that **the human is created in God's image - *B'tselem Elohim*. We all contain the divine spark, and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. This applies to all people, whether they are incarcerated or not.**

The second text is in Genesis Chapter 2, where we learn that **"It is not good for the human to be alone."** This is a powerful statement about our need to be nurtured by others at all times in our life but, I would add, especially for juveniles, who are immature and needy human beings. It is never good to be away from the nurturing company of other people, but **juveniles should not be alone during the difficult time of incarceration.** These two verses inspire the spiritual and moral imperative to work for changes to solitary confinement laws. Because all juveniles in Maryland currently start in the adult system, they often are placed in restrictive housing to protect them from harm.

The most recent data from the State of Maryland on its practices regarding restrictive housing shows that **the average time spent in disciplinary restrictive housing was 28 days in fiscal 2025 for transgender individuals and 27 days for the overall population.** The Mandela Rules from the United Nations, updated in 2015, are a revised minimum standard of UN rules that defines solitary confinement as "the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact." **Solitary confinement may only be imposed in exceptional circumstances, and "prolonged" solitary confinement of more than 15 consecutive days is regarded as a form of torture. Maryland must end this abusive use of restrictive housing for extended periods of time.**

Solitary confinement is an archaic practice that should be ended and has been proven to be detrimental to adolescents who are especially susceptible to the toxic nature of this restrictive housing. I know that if my children or grandchildren were exposed to extreme idleness, sensory deprivation, and lack of human interaction, they would suffer lasting physical and emotional damage. I support this bill which would restrict vulnerable people from being placed in restrictive housing – including people who are 22 years of age or younger; 55 years of age or older; women who are pregnant, postpartum, recently experienced a miscarriage, or caring for a child and LGBT or intersex. This bill is one step toward treating incarcerated Marylanders with the dignity and respect that all people deserve.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for HB1154.

