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TESTIMONY ON HB 1154 – In Favor

### **Restrictive Housing Limitations**

**TO:** Chair and members of the House Judiciary Proceedings  
Committee

**FROM:** Pastor Zacharias

My name is Pastor Zacharias. As a member of the faith community and Executive Director of Interfaith Action for Human Rights, I submit this testimony in strong support of HB1154, legislation to place meaningful restrictions on the use of restrictive housing in Maryland’s jails and prisons.

My support for HB1154 is grounded in the principles of restorative justice. Individuals who are incarcerated should be afforded opportunities to reflect, amend, heal, and prepare for a successful return to society. With appropriate wraparound services—spiritual guidance, mental health care, educational programming, and social support—people can grow and return to their communities as healthier and more constructive citizens.

Extensive research has documented the severe psychological harm caused by prolonged solitary confinement. Confinement for fifteen days or longer is widely recognized as torture and can result in immediate and lasting damage to an individual’s mental health. I support strict limits on the duration of restrictive housing, including no more than twenty days within a sixty-day period.

I also encourage amendments that would strengthen this legislation by ensuring access to rehabilitative programming and requiring a minimum of four hours of meaningful out-of-cell time daily. Such measures are essential to safeguarding the well-being and dignity of incarcerated individuals.

Restrictive housing, as currently implemented, continues to undermine basic human dignity and fundamental standards of humane treatment. In Maryland, its application remains deeply concerning. The Fiscal Year 2022 restrictive housing report documented an average length of stay of approximately 42.5 days—far exceeding the threshold that research and international human rights standards identify as psychologically harmful. More alarmingly, the most recent annual report indicates a substantial increase in the use of restrictive housing, particularly among individuals diagnosed with mental illness. This upward trend raises serious concerns about oversight, accountability, and the profound and disproportionate harm inflicted on some of the most vulnerable people within the correctional system.

Maryland has an opportunity to lead with integrity and compassion. Passage of HB1154 would represent a meaningful step toward reducing harm, promoting rehabilitation, and upholding the values of justice and human dignity.

Thank you for your consideration. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1154.

Sincerely,  
Pastor Zacharias  
Executive Director  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights