

Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Natasha White, and I submit this testimony in strong support of SB0268 and its focus on protecting individuals with serious mental illness from practices that worsen their condition rather than treat it.

SB0268 is grounded in a simple but critical truth: people with mental illness require care, treatment, and stability—not punishment, isolation, or coercive practices that exacerbate trauma and psychological harm. When individuals experiencing mental health crises are placed in restrictive or punitive environments, their symptoms often intensify. This results in higher rates of self-harm, suicide attempts, behavioral deterioration, and long-term disability.

Extensive medical and correctional research confirms that isolation and harsh control-based responses are especially damaging to people with mental illness. These practices can induce paranoia, hallucinations, severe anxiety, and emotional breakdowns. For many, the experience is indistinguishable from torture. Rather than restoring order or improving safety, such approaches destabilize individuals and increase the likelihood of crisis, injury, and costly emergency interventions.

SB0268 represents a shift toward evidence-based, humane responses by prioritizing clinical assessment, therapeutic intervention, and individualized treatment planning. This approach protects both the individual and staff by reducing volatility and creating structured, supportive environments where de-escalation and recovery are possible.

Importantly, this bill does not compromise institutional safety. Instead, it strengthens it. Facilities that emphasize treatment over punishment see reductions in use-of-force incidents, fewer medical emergencies, and improved compliance with rules. When people feel respected and supported, they are more likely to stabilize and participate constructively in their own care.

This legislation also aligns with our moral and constitutional obligations. People with mental illness do not lose their right to humane treatment because they are incarcerated or detained. SB0268 affirms that mental health conditions must be addressed as health issues—not behavioral defects deserving of extreme control.

In closing, SB0268 moves us away from outdated practices that cause harm and toward a system rooted in dignity, safety, and medical integrity. It sends a clear message that our state will not rely on isolation and suffering to manage mental illness, but on treatment, compassion, and accountability.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **Favorable Report** on SB0268.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Natasha White

Director of Community Engagement
Interfaith Action for Human Rights