

February 25, 2026

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 60,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

Solitary confinement can lead to the exacerbation of preexisting conditions or the onset of acute mental illness. The consequences are often fatal; research shows that half of all suicides in prisons and jails occur in solitary confinement. Furthermore, any amount of time spent in isolation increases the risk of death in the first year after release, with individuals being 78% more likely to die by suicide and 127% more likely to die of an opioid overdose in the first two weeks following their release.

SB 908 directly addresses these tragic outcomes by mandating that members of a vulnerable population "may not be placed in restrictive housing for any period of time". This protects individuals with a disability based on mental illness or has a history of psychiatric hospitalization or has recently exhibited conduct indicating the need for further observation or evaluation, including self-mutilation, to determine the presence of serious mental illness.

Additionally, we support the bill's requirement that all restrictive housing units create the "least restrictive environment necessary" for safety. The inclusion of the Correctional Ombudsman to review implementation through unannounced visits, log reviews, and anonymous surveys ensures that these life-saving standards are strictly upheld.

Solitary confinement fails to improve public safety and instead creates a cycle of trauma and violence. By passing SB 908, Maryland has the opportunity to replace a system of "the box" with one of care and human dignity. We urge a favorable report.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Stephanie Slowly-Little
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