

Testimony of
PEACE & SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE
Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring, MD 20860

The Peace & Social Concerns Committee writes to join constituents across Maryland's many faith traditions **in strong support of** SB 908 and HB 1154. These identical, cross-filed bills would limit the use of solitary confinement in Maryland's state-run correctional facilities – called Restrictive Housing in Maryland. The brutality and persistent harms of solitary confinement cannot be overstated, for individuals, families, the communities to which confined persons return, and to the moral and financial costs to the State of Maryland.

These bills would bring Maryland's definition in line with international human rights standards adopted by a growing number of US states, by limiting solitary to maximum of 15 consecutive days or total of 20 in any 60 day period, and forbidding "restrictive housing" for several categories of vulnerable people including minors, pregnant people, persons having a mental or developmental disability or psychiatric hospitalization history.

Quakers are often 'credited' with introducing solitary confinement to the US in the late 1700s with the thought that time spent alone in contemplation would give convicted individuals an opportunity to consider their sins and repent (hence the term "penitentiary"). However, Quakers quickly learned this was a grave mistake, and have opposed solitary confinement by any name since the 1800s. Over time, it became clear that forced isolation, particularly for weeks, months and years as occurs in Maryland, causes or exacerbates mental illness. In addition, enforced idleness is physically debilitating, and undermines any preparation for re-entry to society. It is harmful and not corrective. A truly important element of these bills is their requirement that out-of-cell time for individuals in restrictive housing time must include structured and meaningful access to Programming, Treatment, Social interaction, and Recreation.

Isolated Persons Suffer. It is well documented that Incarcerated persons placed in restrictive housing suffer physical and psychological harms, such as psychosis, trauma, severe depression, serious self-injury, or suicide.

Families Suffer. Individuals in restrictive housing are generally denied visits and calls from family. This breaks down the family ties that are crucial to supporting people upon re-entry.

Communities Are NOT Safer. Research shows that time spent in solitary may increase people's likelihood of post-release offending, especially violent re-offending. This is made

still worse when incarcerated people are released directly from restrictive housing into the community. Thus as practiced in Maryland, solitary causes more harm than it prevents to public safety.

Solitary Confinement Costs the State More. We are impressed by the research gathered by Interfaith Action for Human Rights from other states that restricting the use of solitary saves money (citing studies from Mississippi, Illinois and California).

Extra-Judicial. Lawmakers and citizens need to appreciate that the horrors of solitary confinement are never imposed by a judge as part of a person's sentence. It is extra-judicial. Restrictive housing is often an ad hoc decision within a facility with little oversight and no real appeal, often for pretty minor things. The harms of solitary are profoundly disproportionate to its common use – and morally and legally objectionable. Importantly this bill will add essential procedures for the lawful use of restrictive housing.

We urge the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to support SB 908 and members of the House Government & Labor Committee to support HB1154.

Sincerely,

Barbara L Bezdek
Recording Clerk
For the BYM PSCC