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To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to give a favorable report to SB0268. This bill prohibits the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correction from placing an individual with certain disabilities in restrictive housing, or segregation, for more than 15 days out of the month. This bill is an important first step towards establishing safety and equity for inmates with disabilities who are otherwise disproportionately harmed by correctional processes, the environment, and other inmates.

Incarcerated individuals with disabilities have a disproportionately higher likelihood of being placed into administrative and disciplinary segregation. This is due to a number of factors, including difficulty understanding or adapting to policies and rules due to their disabilities, information being only provided in a single medium they cannot understand as quickly as others, being bullied by other inmates because they are viewed as vulnerable, and a system that does not allow for differing communication methods. Moreover, an overburdened system places individuals with disabilities in segregated housing because it is frankly easier than trying to accommodate their disabilities.

The National Federation of the Blind has sued the State of Maryland for how dismally they treat blind and low vision incarcerated individuals, which led to a settlement that has established more fairness for such individuals. However, the system is still broken for all those with disabilities, not just the blind.

Though this bill has some limitations – namely that it is not inclusive of hidden disabilities and that frankly 15 days out of a month is still way too long to segregate people with disabilities, it is better than the status quo. Incremental progress is better than no progress.

For those reasons, we ask for a favorable report on SB0268. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.