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Maryland House of Delegates
Lowe House Office Building
Judiciary Committee
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Greetings Honorable Judiciary Committee Members,

My name is Donald Joseph Bovello and I am writing in regard to House Bill 310 - Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing – Individuals with Developmental or Intellectual Disabilities.

In my over 3 decades of incarceration in Maryland prisons, I have personally witnessed the inhumane treatment of individuals who were placed in disciplinary and administrative segregation, as well as individuals who were housed on the Correctional Mental Health Center-Jessup. Individuals with physical, mental and/or intellectual disabilities were often mistreated, especially when isolated and hidden away in solitary confinement. Today's politically correct culture has renamed solitary confinement "segregation" or "restrictive housing". The bottom line here is that human beings are removed from general prison population and put into an inhumane isolated environment.

Let me dispel the myths of "restrictive housing". These cell blocks or units are separated and "cut off" from the general population. The usual schedule is 23-1/2 hours in the cell three days a week and 24 hours in the cell for the remainder. The time allowed out of the cell is for a quick shower, a brief phone call (if available) and any time remaining can be spent in a recreational room. This is within a 30-minute period. (Staffing shortages can limit this time out of the cell to 15-minutes.) Other than that time out of the cell, inmates generally only come out of the cells for a trip to medical, an attorney visit, an out-of-prison trip or upon staff request for an interview or meeting.

Twice during my incarceration I was in solitary confinement. Once for disciplinary confinement for 15 days and administrative confinement for over 20 days.

During both confinements, I felt the impact of being isolated and confined. It is a very unpleasant feeling. I felt trapped and alone. I was cut off not only from the general population, but I felt even further away from my family outside of prison. I experienced an emotional roller coaster

and when berated by correctional officers, I felt a sense of helplessness and despair because I thought the end of this restrictive housing would never end.

There is no sense of time except for sunrise, sundown and meals in between. There is no news of the outside world or even news of what was occurring within the general population of that prison. This was very disorienting.

Throughout the day and night there is yelling and screaming; smells of body odor, decaying food, urine and feces; and often insects and rodents. It is not uncommon to hear the screams of individuals who are being beaten or mistreated by correctional officers.

While my duration of time in restrictive housing may seem short to one who has never been stripped of everything except for two changes of clothing, a towel, bar of soap, toothpaste and toothbrush, but for those in prison, each day is an eternity.

I still have traumatic thoughts and feelings about my two times in restrictive housing. I cannot begin to fathom the effects of restrictive housing has on individuals with physical, mental, intellectual and/or emotional disabilities.

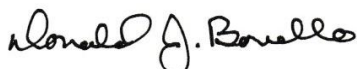
A person who has mental, intellectual and/or emotional disability, may be able to “mask” their disability while in general population, but when separated and isolated in restrictive housing, such a person (as I have witnessed) deteriorates rapidly and the worse such a person reacts to their confinement, the harsher they are treated by correctional staff.

Additionally, I worked as blood spill for 6 years which required me to work in segregation and seclusion areas where individuals with intellectual disabilities were housed in solitary confinement for extended periods of time. I saw the negative effects of being locked in a cell for extended lengths of time only being allowed out 2 to 3 times a week for a shower and phone call. An individual with minimal disabilities experiences trauma, an individual with intellectual, emotional, and mental disabilities, is scarred to a point where I have seen their attitudes and behavior change, and not for the better. Depression, isolation, becoming non-communicative, alienating from family and friends are just a few of the negative effects I have witnessed.

I believe there are better ways of addressing behavioral issues of individuals within Maryland prisons, but I recognize that for now, restrictive housing is the manner of addressing certain issues. As such, I am asking for a favorable report and support of SB0268 to limit the amount of time spent in restrictive housing.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my letter and I pray a favorable report of HB310.

Respectfully,



Donald J. Bovelto