

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Honorable Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee Members,

My name is Steven Clark and with support of the person reading this I would like to provide testimony for LD 696. Let me quickly qualify my testimony, I am an incarcerated citizen at the Maine State Prison. I am also a certified substance abuse rehabilitation technician, a certified mental health and rehabilitation technician, a recovery coach, and am currently on my third semester of graduate school studying psychology to better understand the whys of what brings men and women into prison. I spent my first semester researching mental health, peer support, and the harmful affects of imprisonment and segregation.

Over the past nine years the prison has allowed me to mentor, facilitate, and coach men at the prison. Six years ago I began a journey to provide those services to men in segregation. Two years ago I completed my internship for my second Bachelors degree in Mental Health and human services there. For the purpose of this testimony let me share that experience with you. I came to understand each man I worked with was not a violent monster or someone who was unredeemable. None of the men I encountered were so out of control or violent that they should be locked in a small six by eight room for 23 to 24 hours a day. Each of these men all were looking for the same thing, connection and healing. Each one of these men had experience significant trauma in their lives and they needed love, so simple they needed human connection and support.

Not one of the men I worked with were better off as a human being as a result of being in segregation, in fact, I would suggest the opposite is true. Each one of these men were worse as a result of solitary confinement. Men became paranoid, were overwhelmed with stress, lost self-esteem, and participated in self harm or became suicidal. Men are placed in these small cells sometimes with nothing not even a book. In some cases men are put in cells where there is still blood and bodily fluids present. I had a hard time believing this until recently when an older gentlemen who I live with in the honor pod went out for a procedure and had to quarantine in the segregation unit because of Covid protocol. He told me there was feces on the walls, still in the toilet, and blood on the door of his cell. Despite asking for cleaning products he was not given any until the next day. The conditions of segregation would put an animal shelter out of business. These conditions are impacted by stress. Men are stressed and asking for

help. The challenge is the services in segregation were lacking. It was common for mental health professionals to miss appointments. A man sits all week waiting to see someone and they don't show, imagine how they feel. They shared that they felt let down and angry.

Although many guards are professional and have compassion, several others are abusive and there is provocation. For example, one man I worked with went without toilet paper for a day, three others told me during the night when officers would do rounds they would bang on the doors to wake these men up. This again creates more stress. I have recently learned in graduate school through the psychologist Fred Luskin when a human is stressed blood flows out of the part of the brain that is responsible for thinking straight. A human goes into flight, fight, and freeze. That is what these men are dealing with at all times - the stress response and because of the environment of segregation these men are stuck in it. Human beings are similar to plants. If you put a plant in the dark, give it no sunlight, and nutrients it does not grow. Human beings are largely heliotropic in nature, meaning our ability to evolve requires positivity and a stable environment. Segregation creates an environment that is about digression and instability. Combine that with lack of positivity and you have a perfect storm.

Segregation is such a powerful example of warehousing human being. We are taking broken people, placing them in segregation, separating them from love and connection, from positivity, we over medicate them, provide them very minimal services, then release them which is a disaster.

We wonder why the prison system has a 66 percent recidivism rate within 3 years. If route 95 had a 66 percent fatality rate don't you think they would shut it down to find out what the challenge was? I submit to you all today segregation is part of that challenge.

This perfect storm is leading to people who are unstable and are being further abused and traumatized who will be allowed to be released back into our communities to create more victims.

At \$74,000 a year to house a prisoner can't we provide better services than locking someone who has experienced a great deal of abuse and trauma in their lives in isolation. Is that a positive use of our tax dollars?

If anyone of you get online and google harmful affects of segregation you will find 1000s of results why segregation does not work. Perhaps one of the most powerful things you may find would be the Frontline documentary that was made at the Maine State Prison segregation unit. It's still the same.

Despite the research, findings, the evidence, the testimony, we are still allowing human beings to suffer the harmful consequences of being isolated in a small room with very little positive stimulation. A few months ago, I attempted to go to the segregation unit to mentor a young man named Zach. I was told his behaviors did not match up with me being able to go down and support him, he had to behave first. My question to the unit manager was when we are struggling and dealing with something isn't that when we need the most support in our lives? I was told "I don't know what to tell you."

By not voting to eliminate solitary confinement, this is the environment that you are supporting, one that does not allow help, one that thrives off human suffering, and one that brings tears to my eyes. I have fought to bring a mentorship program to this unit and that too has been rejected time and time again. So I leave you with the question, if your son was in isolation and getting sicker and sicker, was unable to get support, and was overly medicated what would you do? Would you sit there and allow him to suffer, or would you fight for his wellbeing?

By supporting an end to segregation/solitary confinement, you are supporting the wellbeing of human beings, you are supporting the end to unnecessary suffering , and you are creating a safer Maine community.

Sincerely yours,
Steven Clark
Maine State Prison

Steve Clark
Maine State Prison

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Honorable Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee Members,

My name is Steven Clark and with support of the person reading this I would like to provide testimony for LD 696. Let me quickly qualify my testimony, I am an incarcerated citizen at the Maine State Prison. I am also a certified substance abuse rehabilitation technician, a certified mental health and rehabilitation technician, a recovery coach, and am currently on my third semester of graduate school studying psychology to better understand the whys of what brings men and women into prison. I spent my first semester researching mental health, peer support, and the harmful affects of imprisonment and segregation.

Over the past nine years the prison has allowed me to mentor, facilitate, and coach men at the prison. Six years ago I began a journey to provide those services to men in segregation. Two years ago I completed my internship for my second Bachelors degree in Mental Health and human services there. For the purpose of this testimony let me share that experience with you. I came to understand each man I worked with was not a violent monster or someone who was unredeemable. None of the men I encountered were so out of control or violent that they should be locked in a small six by eight room for 23 to 24 hours a day. Each of these men all were looking for the same thing, connection and healing. Each one of these men had experience significant trauma in their lives and they needed love, so simple they needed human connection and support.

Not one of the men I worked with were better off as a human being as a result of being in segregation, in fact, I would suggest the opposite is true. Each one of these men were worse as a result of solitary confinement. Men became paranoid, were overwhelmed with stress, lost self-esteem, and participated in self harm or became suicidal. Men are placed in these small cells sometimes with nothing not even a book. In some cases men are put in cells where there is still blood and bodily fluids present. I had a hard time believing this until recently when an older gentleman who I live with in the honor pod went out for a procedure and had to quarantine in the segregation unit because of Covid protocol. He told me there was feces on the walls, still in the toilet, and blood on the door of his cell. Despite asking for cleaning products he was not given any until the next day. The conditions of segregation would put an animal shelter out of business. These conditions are impacted by stress. Men are stressed and asking for help. The challenge is the services in segregation were lacking. It was common for mental health professionals to miss appointments. A man sits all week waiting to see someone and they don't show, imagine how they feel. They shared that they felt let down and angry.

Although many guards are professional and have compassion, several others are abusive and there is provocation. For example, one man I worked with went without toilet paper for a day, three others told me during the night when officers would do rounds they would bang on the doors to wake these men up. This again creates more stress. I have recently learned in graduate school through the psychologist Fred Luskin when a human is stressed blood flows out of the part of the brain that is responsible for thinking straight. A human goes into flight, fight, and freeze. That is what these men are dealing with at all times - the stress response and because of the environment of segregation these men are stuck in it. Human beings are similar to plants. If you put a plant in the dark, give it no sunlight, and nutrients it does not grow. Human beings are largely heliotropic in nature, meaning our ability to evolve requires positivity and a stable environment. Segregation creates an environment that is about digression and instability. Combine that with lack of positivity and you have a perfect storm.

Segregation is such a powerful example of warehousing human being. We are taking broken people, placing them in segregation, separating them from love and

connection, from positivity, we over medicate them, provide them very minimal services, then release them which is a disaster.

We wonder why the prison system has a 66 percent recidivism rate within 3 years. If route 95 had a 66 percent fatality rate don't you think they would shut it down to find out what the challenge was? I submit to you all today segregation is part of that challenge.

This perfect storm is leading to people who are unstable and are being further abused and traumatized who will be allowed to be released back into our communities to create more victims.

At \$74,000 a year to house a prisoner can't we provide better services than locking someone who has experienced a great deal of abuse and trauma in their lives in isolation. Is that a positive use of our tax dollars?

If anyone of you get online and google harmful affects of segregation you will find 1000s of results why segregation does not work. Perhaps one of the most powerful things you may find would be the Frontline documentary that was made at the Maine State Prison segregation unit. It's still the same.

Despite the research, findings, the evidence, the testimony, we are still allowing human beings to suffer the harmful consequences of being isolated in a small room with very little positive stimulation. A few months ago, I attempted to go to the segregation unit to mentor a young man named Zach. I was told his behaviors did not match up with me being able to go down and support him, he had to behave first. My question to the unit manager was when we are struggling and dealing with something isn't that when we need the most support in our lives? I was told "I don't know what to tell you."

By not voting to eliminate solitary confinement, this is the environment that you are supporting, one that does not allow help, one that thrives off human suffering, and one that brings tears to my eyes. I have fought to bring a mentorship program to this unit and that too has been rejected time and time again. So I leave you with the question, if your son was in isolation and getting sicker and sicker, was unable to get support, and was overly medicated what would you do? Would you sit there and allow him to suffer, or would you fight for his wellbeing?

By supporting an end to segregation/solitary confinement, you are supporting the wellbeing of human beings, you are supporting the end to unnecessary suffering , and you are creating a safer Maine community.

Sincerely yours,
Steven Clark
Maine State Prison