

## POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

### LD 696: An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

I am writing this paper in Support of LD 696. In 2015 I met an amazing man named Arron. I learned that he had been incarcerated in Maine State Prison in Warren from 2008 to 2012, and that over a year of that time was spent in segregation due to him engaging in an inappropriate relationship with a staff member. We had five years together. Our time was cut short because Arron died by suicide in February 2020. I believe that part of Arron's inability to stay mentally well was because of the time he spent in segregation and his inability to deal with that trauma and reintegration into society.

What I learned throughout our five-year relationship is just how much impact that time in segregation had on Arron. To treat the fluctuations in his mental health Arron turned to substances. His inability to overcome the demons created during his incarceration, I believe, is one of the reasons why Arron's mental health eventually overcame him. Arron very much struggled to be alone, but also struggled in large crowds. When he was alone, he would feel like he was being watched. In large crowds, he couldn't handle the feeling of being touched by strangers. Excessive noise would send him into panic attacks or fits of rage. When we would go out places, he would always have to sit so that his back was to a wall, he could see the door, and he had a clear exit at any time. He had to sleep with the TV on as he couldn't handle the quiet in the house. He would often sleep with clothes on so that he wasn't vulnerable if someone came into our house. It didn't matter how much I reasoned with him, this was our life and I learned a new way of living so that Arron was comfortable as he could be. I do not know if Arron ever stopped being an inmate, but to me, he was intelligent, funny, ambitious, and his smile lit up an entire room. A piece of me went with him when he died and I won't ever forget him or our time together.

According to many scientific experiments and studies, it is very clear that solitary confinement has adverse effects on the mental health of residents.<sup>1</sup> Prisoners deprived of social interactions for most of the day, for possibly months on end, can experience extreme damage to the brain. Prisoners may develop depression because of the confinement. They may also develop suicidal thoughts due to being alone for hours, as well as hallucinations and a loss of a sense of reality. These are all symptoms that Arron experienced during our time together.

In addition, residents who spend time in solitary confinement tend to be more bitter and angry, which goes against the rehabilitation goal of the prison system. In solitary confinement, prisoners also experience extreme boredom and stress. They can emerge from the experience having prolonged problems with sleeping and concentrating. Arron would go three to four days without sleeping.

Solitary confinement is not the way to deal with any problems correctional staff may experience with residents. The effects are too damaging.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gddlaw.com/2019/03/23/effects-solitary-confinement/#:~:text=According%20to%20many%20scientific%20experiments%20and%20studies%2C%20it,Prisoners%20may%20develop%20depression%20because%20of%20the%20confinement.>