

April 4, 2021

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, Representative Lookner & Honorable Committee Members,

Thank you for your service to the State of Maine. I am here to support doing away with solitary confinement in Maine as the title of LD 696 states.

I spent more than five years in solitary confinement in Maine State Prison in both Thomaston and Warren.

During my time in segregation I witnessed dozens, if not to say hundreds, of horrors. I saw men that were so terrified of the isolation, the lack of contact and movement, the deprivation of sensory experience, that they sought to remedy their fears by severely harming themselves, or by taking their own feces and body fluids and flinging them into their own and others spaces and faces, sometimes by flooding corridors and hallways. On at least two occasions men handed their own cut off testicles to nurses/prison guards (I heard the nurse scream). I heard the gruesome noises of a man with severe mental illness run at the door of his cell and hit his head so many times that he developed a permanent large callus on his head (Mike James, a well known case) And to say that cells were quite regularly 'bathed in blood', from the men whose mental illness was that of cutting themselves, is no overstatement.

Those that guard inmates fall into two essential categories (with many sub-categories). There are the guards who are there to do their jobs, honorably and correctly. The second category is the guard who feels that inmates are not punished severely enough by incarceration and the ensuing deprivations. That category of guard feels that it is his/her job to punish inmates further - with minor and major abuses of power - constant clattering of nightsticks on cages while men are attempting to sleep, pushing and literally pounding men to minor infractions (like having an apple in your cell. or an extra wrapper of sugar, or swearing in response to being left without toilet paper or a pencil for days at a time) that then result in longer times spent in isolation.

Segregation in and of itself is torture. Though its original intent was to improve the chances of inmates to self reflect and even to repent,

unfortunately that is not what happens. There is much evidence to support the fact that long term isolation severely increases anxiety, depression, despair, mental instability, hopelessness, and instances of acting out early trauma and childhood violence.

I want to thank and commend both Commissioner Liberty who, as Warden of MSP and current Warden Magnusson for doing their best to initiate and follow fair policies and procedures.

I know from hard won experience that what Maine is doing in regard to solitary confinement is not working. There is another way. Please act humanely and decisively to prohibit solitary confinement in Maine's Corrections system.

Thank you again for your service to Maine.

Norman Kehling
Swanville, Maine
207 323 6260

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