

February 9, 2022

Good morning, Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and Honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

I am Kandie Cleaves from Garland, and I am here today to testify **in favor of LD_696 An Act to Ban Solitary Confinement in Maine's Correctional Facilities.**

"The primary mission of the Maine State Prison is to protect the public by providing a safe, secure, and humane correctional environment for staff and the incarcerated offender. We further the mission and promote rehabilitation by providing work opportunities and a comprehensive treatment plan that encourages the offender to re-enter society as a law-abiding, productive citizen. Teamwork, professionalism, and integrity are the foundation of the guiding principles and provide a path to our primary mission. "That is what is found on the website for the Maine State Prison. I personally agree that this is what our correctional facilities should be focused on. I also recognize that recent changes have been moving things in a direction that more closely aligns to the mission. Is it enough? No.

As the much-loved character, Charlie Brown said, "Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, 'Where have I gone wrong.' Then a voice says to me, 'This is going to take more than one night.'"

Peter Robbins was the original voice for Charlie Brown. Recently, at age 65 he committed suicide, just over 2 yrs. after being released from prison where he had served 80% of a 5 yr. sentence. In interviews he had described his time in solitary confinement as his lowest point in prison.

According to the Prison Policy Initiative (May 13, 2021), Being put in solitary confinement, is especially harmful to mental health. And they had previously reported, that, "Stress caused by spending time in solitary confinement can lead to permanent changes to people's brains and personalities. Depriving humans — who are naturally social beings — of the ability to interact with others can cause 'social pain,' which affects the brain in the same way as physical pain"

National Library of Medicine (July 2000) **A longitudinal study of prisoners on remand: psychiatric prevalence, incidence, and psychopathology in solitary vs. non-solitary confinement**

"Incidence of psychiatric disorders **developed** in the prison was **significantly higher** in solitary confinement prisoners (28%) than in non-solitary confinement prisoners (15%). "

While the above are studies based on incarceration, the effects of isolation and

confinement do not require one to have been incarcerated or to have personally researched their effects, they simply require us to turn on our TV, to listen to our neighbors or watch the world around us. Society has become a study on how isolation and confinement affect us, mentally and physically, thanks to Covid 19.

Charlie Brown was right, it is going to take more than one night, but what a better time than now to start? Let us go all in on doing what we know works and eliminating what we know does not. If we really want to protect society, reduce recidivism, and prepare those residing within the walls of our correctional facilities to re-enter society, we need to do things differently.

In closing I urge you to **pass LD 696**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kandie Cleaves

Garland