

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



February 9, 2022

Senator Deschambault, Rep Warren and honorable members of the criminal justice and public safety committees. My names is Jan Collins and I am assistant director for Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here today to ask your support in banning [LD 696](#) **An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System.**

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

Before beginning my testimony, I would like to first draw the committees' attention to the sign on letter to Ban Solitary Confinement in Maine with over three hundred and thirty(330) individual signatures and twenty-four organizational signatures from all over the state of Maine. Some signatories you have heard here today and some were not able to be here but have provided written testimony. The groups are varied and far reaching, from mental health advocates to social workers, pediatricians, disability rights groups, groups that advocate for minorities and the disadvantaged and faith organizations including the Maine Council of Churches. Every group recognizes the humanity in all of us and reflect the admonition in Matthew 25:40 "Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me."

The term solitary confinement is used almost nowhere in the United States today. Instead, we use a variety of terms - segregation, isolation, the box, the hole, super max,

administrative control unit and in our juvenile correctional facility “room confinement”.
(Yes we have been using it with our youth.)

When we use a variety of terms whose definitions are not clear, it is difficult to determine just how many people are affected by this practice. Our current data reporting methods also obscure the length of time some of our residents have served in conditions recognized by the United Nations as solitary confinement. But most of all, it does not tell us the number of suicides, attempted suicides, self mutilation, blood transfusions, concussions, colostomies, cell extractions, or lost lives that our treatment of the least of these has resulted in.

Michael is in “segregation” at Maine Correctional Center. You heard his testimony earlier and his story is well documented by reporter Lance Tapley who has also submitted testimony. Micheal was placed in DHHS custody in 1985, because his mother beat him repeatedly and severely for his first two and a half years of life. She lost custody in 1991. He did not see her for the following 10 years in which he was hospitalized 8 or 9 times. He has had so many mental health diagnosis that he is a walking textbook. He is covered by the AMHI consent decree. He has spent about 18 of the 21 years he has been in DOC in conditions of solitary confinement. Michael has scars all over his arms where he has cut himself. He has scars on his head where he has run full force at his cell walls with his head down.

Everyday Michael asks me to help him get treatment for his untreated medical issues. When I told him I would be giving testimony today, he pleaded with me to ask your help. Michael did not deserve the abuse that he suffered at the hands of his mother. He does not deserve the beatings that he has received at the hands of his prison caretakers.

Michael is scheduled to be released in November. It is likely that he will be released directly into the community from segregation.

Michael sent me this message yesterday.

*“What if i dont want to leave prison ever again is it wrong to feel this way im so far in left
feild i dont know whats good for me any more i really dont.
What if i really feel my lifes not worth it.”*

I am asking you to answer Michaels plea for help.

I am asking you to support a ban on solitary confinement In Maine.

Thank-you,
Jan M. Collins
Wilton, ME