

Leo Hylton – Solitary Confinement Testimonial

Honorable State Representatives

My name is Leo Hylton and I am writing in support of LD 696 – An Act to Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine

I am a 2nd year graduate student at The Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution. I am a Visiting Instructor at Colby College's Anthropology Department. And, I have spent two and half years of my life in segregation units—solitary confinement.

I have spent thousands of hours, day and night, listening to the screaming and hate-filled shouting of men clawing at their souls to get the demons out. When I close my eyes, I can feel the mule kicking on steel doors reverberate through my body. I can see the blood-smeared windows and chained bodies being half-dragged, half-carried down the feces-laden corridor by nameless, faceless, riot-gear-clad members of the 'goon squad' who seemed to get a sick satisfaction from inflicting pain on an already wretchedly suffering human being. And, when I am feeling particularly masochistic, I can take myself back to the physical sensations of suffocating through layers of mace while having my head wrenched back by my hair so the Sgt on that squad could get a good aim to blast my face once more with the chemical agent.

At least two knees on my back, compressing my lungs. Head snapped back to constrict my throat. Mace and mucous closing off my eyes and nose. Arms and legs chained behind my back. I chose this. I knew what I was in for, and I chose to endure this suffering.

Why? So the men who followed me into these hellish conditions could have proper clothes and a radio. And maybe the chance to order some overpriced hygiene and soups from the prison canteen.

I know this is no longer the norm at Maine State Prison. Objectively speaking, I can look around the Administrative Control Unit and see what would have looked like a vacation spot when I was busy having my airways closed off.

Yet, when I listen to the men currently trapped in those confines, I hear the same soul-clawing screams from years past. When I allow myself to hear them with my heart, I cannot deny that the suffering is the same. The isolation is the same. The disconnection from humanity is the same.

Solitary Confinement—and any space of existence that reflects such suffering—must be prohibited everywhere. And we can start in Maine.

Please, pass LD 696 into law, so we can take a step out of the horrific past whose scars are worn by countless thousands of bodies and minds. And into a future that seeks to meet harm with healing.

To hear me read my testimonial in my own voice, please see:

<https://vimeo.com/675256456/1213ba20f2>

Jonathan Courtney
Cape Elizabeth
LD 696

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