

Joseph Jackson
Lisbon
LD 696

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC)
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To: Committee Members for Criminal Justice
Fm: Joseph Jackson: MPAC Executive Director
Re: letter in support LD 696

02/09/2022

Honorable Members of Criminal Justice

My name is Joseph Jackson, and I'm the Executive Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC), MPAC is a statewide group formed in 2007. I am also a member of the Juvenile Justice task force. I am here today to testify in favor of LD 696. The Bill to Ban Solitary Confinement in Maine.

I have experienced solitary confinement. I spent twenty years in the Maine Department of Corrections. I was once locked up 23 hours a day for two years. During that period I developed severe headaches from the light that never went off in my cell. The light was so bright I could read the newspaper in the middle of the night. When I tried to seek medical attention for the headaches officers told me to use a blindfold. I continued to submit grievances and seek remedies for the headaches. One day while out on recreation I returned to my cell to discover the mattress had been removed. I slept on concrete for over 40 days. When I finally was finally taken to see a specialist I was diagnosed with Glaucoma.

I could share many stories of men being bum-rushed by a Tactical team, of men suffering from psychosis playing with feces or cutting into their own flesh. I could share how I would look through my cell window and see body fluid stains for months on end.

The Maine Department of Corrections says it no longer has solitary confinement in Maine. MPAC has had an uptick in the last year of requests from individuals saying they are in solitary confinement. Men spoke of being locked up for extended periods, lack of cleanliness in the block, not being provided adequate hygiene products, cut off from rehabilitative programming and feeling targeted by staff.

We received a request for help from a mentally ill young man who was in solitary back when I was there.

A few months back men with the Administrative Control Unit staged a hunger strike as a strategy to speak to superiors in Augusta about the quality of the food.

In dialog with prison administrators I was directed to the Administrative Control Unit policy. I was shocked to see many of the policies were the same policies that were in place when it was called solitary.

MPAC is in support of this bill because it will finally put an end to this barbaric practice in Maine.

Joseph N. Jackson : Executive Director
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