

**LD 696 - An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System**  
Statement in Support

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Hello. My name's Rob Korobkin.

I own and operate the Courage House - it's a twenty-bed halfway house in Gorham for guys who've survived drug use and incarceration.

I'd like to tell the committee about something I call the "coffee test." In this instance, when was the last time you got a cup of coffee with somebody who'd been incarcerated in Maine's jails or prisons, let alone somebody currently incarcerated? Just a cup of coffee.

One of the primary things I do at Courage House is listen to the guys:

- Recently, one guy shared with me about having spent two months in the "shoe" - Special Housing Unit (SHU) - at the Cumberland County jail. Held in his cell 23 hours a day, he'd be woken up at 2am, and asked if he wanted to walk to the showers, in shackles. By three am, his "hour" for the day would be over. If he said no, there would be no break at all.

- Another guy shared with me about watching correctional officers at the Cumberland County Jail pump mace through the vents of a cell in order to torture an inmate who was having a mental health episode.

- Yet a third shared about spending 28 days in the SHU. When he first showed up, he tested positive for Suboxone, a non-debilitating psychiatric medication that he'd purchased on the street because he couldn't afford to see a doctor for it, so the correctional officers punished him with two weeks in the SHU. At the end of that, they offered him one hour in which to urinate. As he'd spent the last two weeks sitting in a box, he obviously didn't have drugs in his system, but when the anxiety proved too much for him to pee within the hour, they locked him back up in solitary for another two weeks.

You got to remember, sitting in a room with zero human interaction, day after day, is excruciating. The UN officially considers it torture if you do it for more than 15 days in a row. So by UN standards, both of these guys were tortured, and neither of them had actually done anything close to warranting it.

Nationally, people in solitary comprise only 6 to 8% of the total prison population, but account for approximately half of those who die by suicide. Severe panic attacks can permanently impact the brain. In fact, social pain can actually cause more suffering than physical pain because of the human ability to relive social pain months or even years later.

So the coffee test is important because you guys wield a great deal of power over these men's lives, many of whom are perfectly lovely, totally nonviolent people whose only crime is self-medicating a mental illness in a prohibited way, yet who are being viciously tortured by the institutions that you yourselves are responsible for overseeing.

But the real reason the coffee test is important is because the people running those institutions routinely come in here and lie to your faces. And if you don't take time to get coffee with the people Maine's sheriffs and wardens are brutally hurting every day, I'm not sure you'd ever know just how incompetent, unprofessional and unreasonably violent Maine's correctional staff actually is. Things desperately need to change. We've got to stop committing international human rights atrocities right and left in Maine.

So, come get some coffee with us!