

Dear Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren, and Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee:

My name is Thomas Kircher and I reside in Biddeford, Maine.

I am writing on behalf of LD 696, A Ban on Solitary Confinement. More precisely, I am writing on behalf of those directly impacted by the practice of Solitary Confinement – those incarcerated in small, cold cells for 20 or more hours each day, day after day, cut off from human contact; for their families and loved ones who suffer with them in solidarity; for the COs and DOC medical staff who witness their sufferings and take this home every day to their families; for the general population of the incarcerated who will find these individuals released back into their midst; and finally, for society at large who also will receive them back into their community.

You must know from work on this Committee that the vast majority of those in Solitary Confinement suffer from trauma and mental illness. LD 696 will help deeply troubled individuals get the help they need. It will also provide for specialized training for COs so that they will have the resources and tools to meet the demands of the most challenging situations in ways other than simply locking suffering individuals behind a steel door. LD 696 will improve conditions on the ground for both the incarcerated population and DOC personnel, as behavioral damage done by lengthy isolation increases violence and decreases safety in prisons.

Your roles as members on this Committee give you a unique opportunity to help Maine's correctional system improve both its principles and practices. Solitary Confinement is an inhumane, destructive practice. The time has come to end it here in Maine. Please support moving LD 696 to consideration by the full Legislature.

Thank you for your work on behalf of all Maine people.

Sincerely,

Thomas Kircher  
9 Benson Road  
Biddeford