

February 9, 2022

Good morning Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Nancy Michaud, I am a resident of Madawaska and I am here today to testify **in favor of LD 696 “An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System”**.

I Nancy Michaud would like to share struggles I have had since experiencing solitary confinement and how it has impacted my mental health. I had been incarcerated back in 1993 and was put in a cell of solitary confinement. I was not able to speak to anyone, stripped in and left in isolation for hours/days. Thoughts of suicide was all I could think about. I had feelings of shame, depression and not wanting to live. My PTSD from prior experiences that had happened to me were imbedded in my mind. Flashbacks and nightmares of what I went through when I had been previously physically and sexually assaulted and tortured went through my mind. Emotionally I believed I deserved it or was being punished. This was a nightmare to the point it destroyed any self-worth I had. After leaving when my time had been served I turned to drugs even harder than I did before I entered the corrections facility. I wanted to die versus wanting to live.

It took me 10 years of intense therapy on a weekly basis to even begin to believe in myself and understand life was worth living. I entered a yearlong program for women who had children program and/or were pregnant. I was pregnant and lived there for about a year and had to work to believe in myself. I learned to live life clean and sober, build my self-esteem while challenging my fears and insecurities, battle my PTSD and trauma on a daily basis. I had to strip myself of all negative thoughts and learn to think positive. This was the best program I had ever done. From there I went to a Sober Halfway House and learned how to continue to stay sober from drugs and alcohol. I was there for a year. then slowly worked my way to living in community, having to work and support myself being a single mother with a child. I also had to deal with fighting DHHS, who had custody of my other two children. This work was most difficult at times. To this day I truly believe if I would had gotten support or put in a long-term program from the beginning when I was struggling instead of being isolated in Solitary Confinement for days, the work and treatment I needed to recover from all this would have been less traumatizing. My PTSD would have not affected me so badly. My depression and anxiety effects would have not taken me back to using drugs again. I would not have had to work so hard to bring myself back to build my self esteem all over again. There are days I still feel this pain inside. Though all the treatments I received taught me to skills that now help me learn to control this pain. I will never forget what I went through. But now I learn to control it from taking over my mind, body and soul, instead of it controlling me. This is what I believe gave me the strength to live again. Isolation increases struggles and made me want to give up. The right treatment gave me skills to build myself up. This is where I needed more support instead of taking it away.

So, this being said, unless you have lived these experiences as I have, you may or will not understand how this can affect others who struggle as I have.

In closing I urge you to pass LD 696. Thank you for listening to my testimony.

Nancy Michaud

Madawaska