

February 7, 2022

Senator Deschambault, Rep Warren and honorable member of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Gayla Sheldon. I am a resident of the Lewiston. I am writing in support of LD 696 An Act to Ban Solitary Confinement in Maine's Correctional System.

Most, if not all individuals in the Criminal Justice System have a history of trauma. Either it be from Adverse Childhood Experience, intimate partner abuse, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, ext. Some individuals may not realize how incarceration trauma is elevated in incarcerated populations. This brings it to one of the most crucial parts of incarceration, solitary confinement, which may also be recognized as segregation.

Lock down for 23 hours a day is immensely detrimental to one's mental health and most if not all residents of incarceration suffer with some form of mental health issue. Being in solitary confinement or as some would say segregation, resident's experience a range of mental health problems such as anxiety, panic, insomnia, paranoia, aggression, self-harm, and depression.

It is known that human interaction (communication) is a platform for mental health, personal growth, and wellness. If solitary confinement was no longer, imagine how much of a positive impact it would be on a person's mental health.

The correctional facility is supposed to be a place where people can rehabilitate and better themselves so when they release, they have the opportunity to be successful. I have seen a lot of negative behavior from correctional officers towards residents of the Maine Correctional Facility such as an officer voicing 'PTSD, I'll show them PTSD,' then either slam a door as hard as they can, jingle their keys excessively, yell so loud it is obscenely ear wrenching, kicking a resident's door as they walk by so hard its echoes throughout the building and more. In solitary confinement it's 4 times worse. I have been in segregation before and have heard things that I still have nightmares from.

I have seen and heard the negative effects this does to people. Let's go back to the part where most if not all residents who are incarcerated already have a history of past severe trauma. How is the correctional center especially in solitary confinement rehabilitating the residents? To me, I see a set up of recidivism. If solitary confinement was banned think how this can lower the risk of trauma to residents.

Most people don't receive the proper help they need either it being a victim of abuse, substance use disorder, mental health etc. It shows in a person's behavior, and when people become a part of the system it doesn't make them any less of a person it makes them a person in which their communities failed to properly give these people a safe and positive support network they needed to begin with. Rehabilitation what does that really look like in the criminal justice system? As I stated above, I am in support of banning solitary confinement in the correctional facilities in Maine. This will decrease the trauma that is inflicted upon individual's and help the residents gain opportunity to improve themselves which they are denied in solitary confinement. What can be done to help decrease the risk of trauma to residents of the Correctional facility?

Sincerely: Gayla Sheldon

