

Amanda Swanberg

Written Testimony for LD 696 - An Act to Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's
Corrections System

Some argue that we already do not use solitary confinement in Maine, but that is just semantics; it's called "room confinement" for youth in the Long Creek Juvenile Development Center, "segregation" for those at the Maine Correctional Facility and "administrative control" at the Maine State Prison. Whatever you name it, it is unjust as it disproportionately impacts people of color and LGBTQ+ persons, it is unethical because it is used as the path of least resistance to deal with young adults and those suffering from mental illness, and it is recognized by the United Nations as a form of psychological and physical torture.

While I understand that corrections officers need a variety of tools at their disposal to manage challenging situations involving residents, solitary confinement is counterproductive to solving behavioral challenges for those incarcerated. It is a proven cause of many mental health problems including but not limited to anxiety, depression, hallucinations, psychosis, and self-harm or suicide. It can contribute to greater tendencies towards violence when people who have experienced it return to their communities, and it increases the likelihood of recidivism, creating an ouroboros of offense, incarceration, and trauma. Our justice system needs to shift the focus from punishment to rehabilitation. Rather than place people in solitary confinement, we should provide them with acute mental health care, timely medical evaluations and treatments, enroll them in nonviolence programs, and also provide facilitated restorative justice practices to resolve their disputes with other residents and officers. We need more mental health workers in residential facilities and corrections officers should feel encouraged and empowered to request consultations and support from them as well as medical professionals, instead of carrying the burden of managing these kinds of cases on their own.

If these arguments do not appeal to your sense of empathy, consider this issue from a fiscal perspective. Housing people in solitary confinement is more expensive than housing them in the general population. Where else would anyone be willing to pay

more for a service that provides poorer results than the more economical option?
Regardless of which argument - humanitarian or fiscal - appeals most, I urge you to support this important piece of human rights legislation.

Sincerely,

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