



May 26, 2021

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
R.I. House State Government and Elections Committee
State House, Room 323
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear Chairman Shanley:

I write to you today on behalf of the Rhode Island Catholic Conference, the advocacy and educational agency of the Diocese of Providence. We strongly support House Bill 5740, the Restrictive Housing Act, which would eliminate solitary confinement of prison inmates.

Pope Francis has equated punishment involving external isolation to a form of “torture.” He teaches that states should not be “allowed, juridical or in fact, to subordinate respect for the dignity of the human person to any other purpose, even should it serve some sort of social utility.” (Address of Pope Francis to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law, October 2014)

The Catholic Church has long opposed overuse of segregated confinement. The Bishops of the United States spoke out against the increasing use of isolation units more than two decades ago. Recently Timothy Cardinal Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, wrote an op-ed in support of ending solitary confinement. (Halt Use of Solitary Confinement in NY, Albany Times Union, March 26, 2021). He stated: “Ultimately, solitary is a denial of the basic dignity and personhood of everyone on whom it is inflicted, which is why people of all faith, or those with no religious faith at all, have decried this horrific treatment of fellow human beings.”

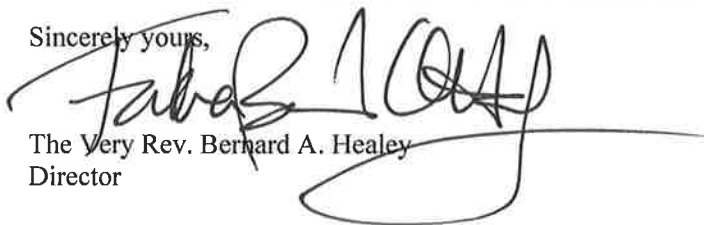
The Church upholds that criminal justice system should seek both justice and mercy, with an emphasis upon restoration of communities, victims, and offenders. Restrictive housing is a means toward none of these ends and is a regressive policy. It is thus important that the State of Rhode Island, at the very least, seriously limit its usage.

Regardless of their offense, prisoners are exposed to the perils of incarceration for the crimes they have committed. Solitary confinement only compiles these perils and limits their hope for rehabilitation. Simply the relative isolation of confinement is enough to aggravate existing mental health issues.

Solitary confinement works against the purpose of improving public safety, both inside our prisons and jails and in our communities. For all Americans committed to building a safer, healthier society, we cannot ignore the mental illness, debilitating trauma and recidivism that are the hallmarks of placing inmates in segregated confinement.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully urges passage of House Bill 5740.

Sincerely yours,



The Very Rev. Bernard A. Healey
Director

Enclosure

Cc: The Hon K. Joseph Shekarchi., The Hon. Christopher R. Blazewski, The Hon. Grace Diaz

One Cathedral Square, Providence, RI 02903
401.278.4500 O - 401.274.5450 F - www.faithfulcitizenri.org

“The Church does not claim ‘to interfere in any way in the politics of the States.’ She does, however, have a mission of truth to accomplish.” -Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate