

END SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

PASS THE **RESTRICTIVE HOUSING ACT**

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WHAT IS SOLITARY CONFINEMENT?

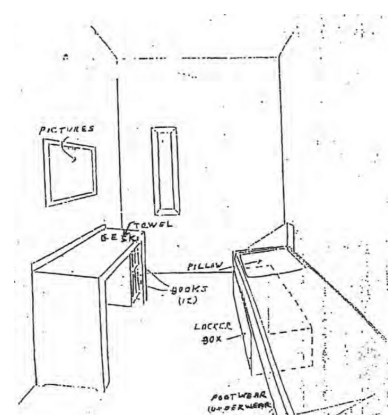
On any given day in 2019, between 55,000 to 62,5000 people were in solitary confinement in U.S. state prisons. Solitary confinement is widely defined as the practice of segregating incarcerated individuals in single-cells for 22+ hours a day with limited to no access to recreation, personal property, and the general population/outside visits. The practice is seen in a variety of prison arrangements such as restrictive housing, administrative segregation, and protective custody.

IT IS INHUMANE AND OUTDATED

The damaging impacts of solitary confinement are well documented. Research consistently shows that the practice produces and/or exacerbates negative mental health symptoms, increases self-harming and suicidal behavior, PTSD, physical harm and mortality post-release. Solitary confinement harms everyone subjected to it, especially those with severe persistent mental illness (SPMI). Though the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) pledged to exclude people with SPMI from restrictive housing, they continued the practice, leading to a lawsuit from Disability Rights Rhode Island.

USED IN RHODE ISLAND

RIDOC defines restrictive housing as: "Any type of detention that involves removal of an inmate from general population, voluntarily or involuntarily; placement in a locked room or cell, whether alone or with another inmate; and the inability to leave the room or cell for the vast majority of the day, typically 22 hours or more." In other words, restrictive housing is solitary confinement. RIDOC Director Coyne-Fague has agreed that "keeping people in cells 23 hours a day is not the way to go" (2018).



"I spent two years in seg, in solitary confinement...It's built to break you. To break your spirit. To break your mind. To me it's a form of torture...[used] to break someone's spirit. I used to call segregation the 'Warehouse of the Broken'... I've seen people literally stab themselves with their eyeglasses to get out of seg...just to have somebody to talk to...it's not right. Something has to be done about it. That's why I'm using my voice, and hopefully it's loud enough and clear enough."

Tarah Dorsey, solitary survivor and community health worker

In line with national changes to solitary confinement, the **Restrictive Housing Act** aims to reduce the use of "restrictive housing" in Rhode Island's Adult Correctional Institute.

THE ACT STATES

Restrictive Housing shall only be used:

- In circumstances that pose a clear and direct threat to safety of persons or the safe and secure operations of the facility
- In the **absence of alternatives** (such as: loss of privileges, change of housing quarters, confiscation of contraband, etc.)
- For the **shortest time period** possible
- With the **least restrictive conditions** possible

It also mandates that RIDOC documents, for every prisoner placed in Restrictive Housing:

- The nature of the threat to safety and security posed by the prisoner
- The impact that conditions of confinement may have on the prisoner's health
- What alternatives exist to safely deal with the threat
- And that the department must create a step-down plan that is shared with the individual and explains what programs and services can help them return to general population

Lastly, it calls for **segregation to be a last resort while rehabilitative and restorative practices are used** to educate, and prepare incarcerated people for returning to society.

ENDING LONG-TERM SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

The Restrictive Housing Act is informed by the successful reforms that have been implemented in prisons nationally:

Maine decreased its solitary confinement population through step-down programs. In one of their youth facilities, limiting the duration of solitary time reduced recidivism from 75% to 20% in just 1 year.

South Dakota uses a specified, narrow list of infractions to justify administrative confinement, in order to reduce subjectivity in interpretation of priorly used criteria such as "an established pattern of misbehavior." Individuals in segregation can earn privileges and less restrictive housing through out-of-cell and in-cell programming. This has reduced incidents of violence.

Nebraska explicitly bans any practice that looks like solitary confinement for minors, pregnant people, and those with serious mental illness, developmental disabilities, or traumatic brain injuries.

New Jersey recently limited the length of solitary confinement to 20 consecutive days.

We urge Rhode Island to follow precedent and pass the **Restrictive Housing Act** for a more humane and safe state.

To get involved, please reach out to our staff organizer at brobinson@opendoorsri.org



END SOLITARY CONFINEMENT: TESTIMONIES

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"Have you ever been in DCU? Locked up 23 and 1? Locked down with no showers, only chow food... only certain things in your cell, deprived of sunlight and blocked off from the outside? Let me tell you, it does some things to your mind. It brings trauma, PTSD, and it's so bad you start talking to roaches and mice. Seeing things you don't normally see. It's mentally/physically bad and some people are stuck from 30 days, where I've seen the most 3 years. Can you imagine that? Hell no you can't. So please fix the inhumane things they are doing to us."

Jalil Nelson, Maximum Security

"The worst thing about segregation is that you truly feel like an animal not a human. Your mind races because you can only stare at the walls all day. You have nothing in your cell but some clothes and one book, a pen, and that's it. You're starving because you can't get any commissary. You're mentally and emotionally depressed because you can only think about getting out. It's another way to dehumanize you and it's a draconian way of tearing you down."

Leroy Dorsey, Maximum Security

"I am doing 100 days in discipline. Other inmates have done 18 months. My day consists of being in my cell 22 hours and 50 minutes. I get one hour of recreation, locked in a cage with another inmate, and a 10 minute shower...on the weekends, I'm locked in my cell for 24 hours a day....I believe that the more we remain in these housing units, the worse we are...You are putting a human being in a cell for 48 hours straight at a time, for months at a time, and expect that person to remain stable? ...Treat someone like an animal, they tend to act like an animal."

Marcel Montiera, High Security

"I've seen people in seg who don't even know me or remember me and I did 6 months with them.... It's brutal and sad to watch someone's mind break, a person who you've had regular conversations with. You don't see them for a few years and they can't even hold a five minute conversation."

Quandell Husband, Maximum Security

"If my voice matters in any way please help to pass this bill into law because we need help."

Anonymous, ACI

To hear more stories from individuals impacted by solitary confinement, please visit stoptortureri.com