



State of Connecticut

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Testimony of Christine Perra Rapillo, Chief Public Defender

Judiciary Committee - March 29, 2019

S. B. 1109, An Act Concerning Solitary Confinement

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports *S.B. 1109, An Act Concerning Solitary Confinement*. This bill expands upon legislation passed in 2017 which prohibited the Department of Corrections from holding anyone under 18 years of age on administrative segregation status. *P.A. No. 17-239, An Act Concerning Isolated Confinement and Correctional Staff Training and Wellness*.

This bill will assure that the damaging effects of isolated confinement will not be imposed upon any inmate, regardless of his/her age. The bill provides that no inmate can be held in either administrative segregation or restrictive housing status as defined. By prohibiting solitary confinement for *any* inmate, the bill will curb the infliction of pain and damage that comes from such confinement and promote rehabilitation and successful re-entry into the community.

The bill does not amend those sections of the statute pertaining to the reporting of the state's use of confinement by the Department of Correction. Subsection (c) of C.G.S. §18-96b requires the reporting of data by the Department of Corrections pertaining to the use of administrative segregation status and restrictive housing status for inmates. However, it is suggested that information pertaining to inmates, especially those under the age of 18 years, in restrictive housing status also include details on the cumulative durations of time the inmates are held on that status.

This Office has substantial experience with and exposure to inmates who have been subjected to periods of isolated confinement in our correctional system. The significant damaging

effects of such confinement are well-established and widely reported. Our own experience lines up with these reports. Some of the categories of damage and behaviors we have observed or encountered include: exacerbation of existing mental illness and mental health issues, self-harming behaviors and suicide attempts, paranoid and obsessive thinking, stunted social skills and loss of relationships with members of the community and other inmates, diminished mental acuity and problems with memory, sleep disturbances, loss of sense of value and purpose, and extreme and intense feelings of despair and hopelessness. A group of medical and other scientific and health-related professionals discussed the collections of studies examining the effects of solitary confinement in an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court. These experts powerfully summarized the findings, explaining:

The wealth of medical and other scientific and health-related research examining the consequences of prolonged use of solitary confinement overwhelmingly concludes that it inflicts profound psychological damage. Studies across nations and decades conclude that the social isolation, sensory deprivation, and extreme idleness inherent in solitary confinement is psychologically toxic and deprives inmates of the basic human needs to function. This leads to dramatic mental deterioration, even in previously healthy individuals.¹

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports this bill. It significantly limits inmates' exposure to isolated confinement and works to prevent this "profound psychological damage". This will help increase the individual's chances of successful reintegration into their communities without being hindered by the lingering effects of trauma from solitary confinement.

¹ The amicus brief in *Ziglar v. Abbasi*, Docket No. 15-1358 (argued 1/18/17) may be found at: <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/ziglar-v-turkmen/>