

**Re: Testimony in favor of restricting the use of solitary confinement**

April 2, 2025

Dear Chair Craven and Honorable Members of the Committee on Judiciary,

I am a social worker and social work professor with extensive experience working with individuals who have experienced trauma. It is with great concern and conviction that I submit testimony in favor of H 5927 restricting the use of solitary confinement in Rhode Island prisons.

In my years of practice, I have seen the profound impact trauma can have on individuals; it can have long lasting impacts on behavior, emotional regulation, relationships, and overall mental and emotional well-being. I have worked with survivors of abuse, neglect, and violence, and the impacts are profound and real.

It is my experience with trauma survivors that compels me to wish to restrict the use of solitary confinement in prisons. It is a deeply disturbing and traumatic practice that is damaging to the health and mental health of those subjected to it. The isolation, the deprivation of human contact, and the lack of meaningful activity only exacerbate pre-existing traumas and create new ones. The psychological effects of solitary confinement are well-documented and can include depression, anxiety, hallucinations, and suicidal ideation. The longer an individual spends in solitary, the more profound and irreversible the effects can become.

Prisons are intended to be places of rehabilitation, not environments that perpetuate and deepen harm. As a social worker, I believe that people who have made mistakes or who have committed crimes, are worthy of dignity and respect. They are human beings who can heal and transform. Solitary confinement, however, undermines this possibility. This is not a humane or effective approach to justice, and no state should be imposing on its citizens. It is the definition of cruel and inhumane treatment – Rhode Island has no business allowing it.

It is unacceptable that we allow this to continue; any prison that argues for its necessity is a prison unable to do its job properly. I urge you to consider the long-term consequences of solitary confinement and create an opportunity for our prison system to learn practices that are more just and effective. Let us be a state that values rehabilitation over punishment and healing over harm.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendy Becker, PhD, LICSW