

## **Bill No: HB 131**

Title: **Correctional Services – Step–Down Programs – Cause of Action**

Committee: Judiciary

Hearing Date: January 27, 2021

### **Position: SUPPORT**

The amount of time a person can be held in solitary confinement before it is considered torture is 15 days. The average amount of time an MD inmate in 2018 would spend in solitary confinement was 45 days. Now, because of COVID-19 restrictions, inmates have been placed in restrictive housing, or solitary confinement, since March of 2020- almost a full year. If 15 days is enough to be considered torture, imagine what 11 months has been like. 11 months confined to a cell, no visitors from outside the facility, and maybe two hours of freedom to leave your cell each day.

In 2020, mental health hit an all-time low in the US due to many factors ultimately resulting from the global pandemic. People lost their jobs, family members, and the ability to socialize with others the way we normally would. Human beings are meant to socialize and interact with other humans. Without these interactions, we fall into depressive and reclusive habits. Incarcerated individuals have been without human interaction since the shutdowns first began in order to prioritize the health of the inmates and staff at correctional facilities. Unfortunately, while the restrictions may have helped slow the spread of disease, the Maryland corrections commission failed to address the numerous mental health issues that would arise with the lack of social contact.

Mental health should be a priority in the state of MD for everyone, incarcerated individuals included. Eventually, many of these individuals will be released from restrictive housing and ultimately back into the community. After being in solitary confinement for nearly a year, it will take some adjusting for inmates to get acclimated and feel like they are ready to rejoin the community. For this reason, they should not go directly from solitary confinement to the general population. There needs to be time dedicated to each inmate to identify and address any type of health issues or problems that may have developed as a result of their confinement. These concerns need to be properly addressed by professionals so when inmates are released, they don't feel as though they are thrown to the wolves.

This happens all too often, especially in black and minority communities. The prison revolving door is seen in underfunded communities in MD like PG county and Baltimore where individuals cannot get the resources they need to address the problems they have that keep landing them back in the prison system. With restrictive housing in MD correctional facilities only making this problem worse, there needs to be a system in place that helps these individuals before they are released back into the community.

If there is no in-between period given to inmates going from solitary confinement back into the community, they will enter society with potential mental health concerns and no one to help

them. This can lead them down paths that find them right back in the prison system where they started. The goal of a corrections facility is not met if the behavior is not corrected, and the behavior has clearly not been corrected if the same individuals are continuously entering back into the system.

This year, several coalitions and advocacy groups in Maryland are fighting for more programs and resources in prisons that will help create a smooth transition from confinement to the community. We can clearly see how a global pandemic has impacted the mental health of Americans across the nation, so we need to consider the mental health of those incarcerated individuals who we cannot see. For that reason, we support legislation that seeks to provide a process to help our incarcerated brothers and sisters enter back into our communities safely and permanently.

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