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My name is Ricardo Burks, and I am a registered voter. Recently, I served thirty-two years of confinement in the Maryland Department of Corrections. Therefore, I am uniquely qualified to offer a first-hand account of the devastating effects of solitary confinement on mental health. For many, suicide becomes the only logical way to escape the terror of isolation. I also contemplated committing suicide while in solitary confinement.

In recent years, the Maryland Division of Corrections made a conscious choice to move away from the phrase solitary confinement in favor of the more sanitized word, administrative segregation. Nevertheless, the only thing that changed was the words; the conditions and the results of such confinement are the same.

I spent several months on administrative segregation in the Maryland Penitentiary. My mind began to construct conversations, two and three-party conversations with myself, spending days asking questions of myself, then answering those questions from different personas. The lack of social contact caused me to become psychotic. I became paranoid, experienced severe panic attacks, and had great difficulties thinking clearly, believing everyone was against me, even my own family. The hallucinations made suicide appear as the perfect solution. I was fortunate. I survived.

I urge this august body to abolish solitary confinement in the great state of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Burks

