



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT S.1623 (Sepulveda)/A.2500 (Aubrey)

AN ACT to amend the correction law, in relation to restricting the use of segregated confinement and creating alternative therapeutic and rehabilitative confinement options

MHANYS supports S.1623 (Sepulveda)/A.2500 (Aubrey) which would create more humane and effective alternatives to isolated confinement, end long-term isolated confinement, restrict criteria for placement in isolated confinement or Residential Rehabilitation Unit (RRUs), and ban special populations from isolated confinement. In addition, the bill includes a number of procedural reforms including enhancing due process protections before placement in isolated confinement or RRUs, creates mechanisms for release from RRUs, and covers all categories of people who currently face isolated confinement.

New York State prisons and jails subject thousands of people every day to the torture of isolated confinement, mostly for minor rule infractions. Inmates are locked into cells 23 hours a day with one hour of recreation time in an outdoor cage. They get no phone calls, no personal property, no programming, no religious services, and there are no legal limits to how long they can be kept. Some prisoners have been in these units for decades. People in isolated confinement (or “solitary,” a.k.a. the Box) are held in their cells 22 to 24 hours a day, for months, years, and even decades at a time without any meaningful human contact or programming. People of color are disproportionately subjected to isolation.

As a mental health advocacy organization MHANYS is particularly concerned about vulnerable people with existing mental health needs. These disorders are exacerbated and remain untreated during solitary confinement. Others, who are at risk of developing mental illnesses when they enter solitary confinement often become ill as a result of confinement. Inmates in segregation routinely report extreme sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, psychiatric decompensation, hallucinations, and behaviors relating to self-harm and even suicide. Moreover, when the symptoms of a segregated inmate’s mental illness escalate, the inmate may be sent to suicide watch, an even more restrictive form of segregation. These conditions amount to torture and must stop!

MHANYS calls urges the Legislature and the Governor to end the torture of isolated confinement by, and to pass the Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, S. 1623/A. 2500.

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