

Support Solitary Confinement Reform

An Act Relative to Segregation Oversight

Sen. Cynthia Creem, S1297 and Rep. Ruth Balsler, H2249



Massachusetts is one of a handful of states that allow prisoners to be placed in solitary confinement for up to ten years for disciplinary infractions. The Commonwealth also allows prisoners to be placed in long-term administrative segregation for a variety of non-disciplinary reasons. These prisoners are locked in a cell that is typically six by eight feet for 23 hours each day in.

Studies have shown that solitary confinement neither deters violent behavior nor reduces recidivism. In Massachusetts, many prisoners are released back to society directly from segregation, traumatized and unprepared for life on the street, making them more likely to recidivate. Persons of color, LGBTQ individuals, and persons who suffer from mental illness are disproportionately represented in segregation units across the country.

Voluminous research substantiating the damaging effects of solitary confinement is leading states across the country to pass reforms aimed at significantly reducing costs while improving public safety.

Prisoners' Legal Services, in coalition with many other organizations across the Commonwealth, seeks to reform the use of segregation in Department of Correction facilities as well as county jails and houses of corrections. One way to address this issue is to:

Create Oversight of Segregation Utilization and Practices

The segregation oversight committee will be charged with 1) collecting specified data from state prisons and county correctional facilities including how and to what extent solitary confinement is used and the mental health status, disability status, age, gender, race, sexual orientation and education background of those held in solitary confinement, and 2) publishing an annual report that compiles the information and data received and which offers recommendations geared towards appropriately limiting the use of solitary confinement in Massachusetts.