

SHINING A LIGHT ON SOLITARY CONFINEMENT: WHY OHIO NEEDS REFORM | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alone.

Locked in a cage. Only the dim fluorescent light and concrete walls to keep you company. Here you will sit all day, every day. Once or twice each day, you are moved from that cage, but just transported to another cage and then right back to your original cage. It is hard to move, so your muscles atrophy. Soon you begin to feel like your brain has atrophied too. Time loses all meaning and your mind begins to play tricks on you. Will you ever be free?

This is not a description from a horror movie—it is real life for the people held in solitary confinement in Ohio prisons. Here are just a few of its inherent problems:

- **Solitary confinement is torture.** It removes too much social interaction from a person's life and inflicts tremendous mental, emotional, and physical pain upon them. Those who have spent time in solitary confinement often describe it as the worst of their prison experiences.
- **People with mental illnesses are especially vulnerable.** Medical experts have condemned solitary confinement because of its terrible effects on a person's psyche. People with mental illnesses are more likely to be held in solitary confinement, and if you did not have a mental illness going in, you are likely to leave with one.
- **It puts public safety at risk.** 95 percent of prisoners are eventually released back into the community, including those in solitary confinement. Every year in Ohio, dozens of prisoners are released directly from solitary to the community, oftentimes given little to no tools to make this difficult transition. Research shows the use of solitary confinement increases recidivism, making our communities less safe.
- **Solitary confinement costs more, while making us less safe.** It costs two and half times as much to house an Ohio prisoner in maximum security prison as it does a medium or minimum security prison, even though solitary confinement has been shown to be ineffective. Other states that have implemented reforms to reduce solitary confinement have saved money and seen decreases in violence at their prisons.

Solitary confinement is damaging to prisoners, ineffective, costly, and makes us less safe—so why are we still using it?

Luckily, Ohio prison officials have begun to realize that solitary confinement is a practice that needs to end. Recently, prison leaders have taken steps to reduce the number of people in the highest security levels, and have pledged other reforms including prohibiting people with serious mental illnesses from entering solitary confinement.

These may be positive reforms, but details and implementation are still being finalized. Ohio can become a national leader in reducing the use of solitary confinement. The ACLU of Ohio and Disability Rights Ohio recommend that Ohio prisons:

- Promote alternatives to solitary confinement and drastically reduce the overall number of people housed in solitary.
- Decrease peoples' length of stay and discourage the use of long-term solitary confinement.
- Increase programming and out-of-cell time to help support prisoners and aid their rehabilitation.

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