



April 13, 2015

The Honorable Cliff Hite
Senate Building
1 Capital Square, First Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Investigation into conditions at Ohio State Penitentiary

Dear Senator Hite,

I write to urge you to exercise your powers as Chair of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC) and immediately initiate an investigation into conditions at the Ohio State Penitentiary (OSP).

As you are undoubtedly aware, staff at OSP have instituted new restrictions on prisoners that allow dangerous levels of solitary confinement and have been met with protests and a hunger strike by prisoners. The new policies include: limitations on prisoners' rights to practice their religion; restrictions on prisoners' ability to move throughout their living quarters; elimination of programming offered to some prisoners; and, cuts to the amount and quality of recreation.

These restrictions were enacted after a December 2014 assault on a corrections officer, and appear to be indefinite. While prison officials certainly must maintain security at the facility, these policies will only undermine the safety and well-being of prisoners, staff and the community.

Solitary confinement is one of the most torturous punishments to which a person may be subjected. Long-term solitary confinement deteriorates a person's mental state and counteracts any attempt at rehabilitation. Even under previous conditions at OSP, prison officials recognized the effect of solitary confinement by placing any person on elevated monitoring by mental healthcare staff who had been on Security Level 5 for a prolonged period of time. With these new extreme conditions, prisoners' mental state will suffer more. This threatens the safety of other prisoners and staff, as those kept in extreme solitary confinement will become less stable and more desperate. The vast majority of prisoners—even those in Security Level 5—eventually are released, meaning these conditions threaten the safety of our communities as well.

This situation cries out for CIIC to investigate and provide the legislature and public with complete answers as to why these policies are in place, their effect on prisoners, and what alternatives prison officials have sought beyond these extreme and arbitrary restrictions. Given the severe and urgent nature of this situation, I ask that you please initiate this investigation quickly.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me by phone at (216)472-2220 or by email at mbrickner@acluohio.org.

Sincerely,

Mike Brickner
Senior Policy Director
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