

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



Solitary Confinement

What's the Problem?

[According to Dr. Juan Mendez](#), the UN Rapporteur on Torture, prolonged solitary confinement that is for 14 or more days is a form of psychological torture. Other experts have documented that prolonged solitary confinement is cruel, expensive and ineffective.

In addition, we are working to eliminate even short term solitary confinement for vulnerable populations, most specifically juveniles or those with severe mental illness. works to reduce prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. prisons at the Federal, State (DC, MD and VA) and local levels. The Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR) works to reduce prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. prisons at the Federal, State (DC, MD and VA) and local levels.

What's the Proposal?

The Interfaith Action for Human Rights proposes that legislation be adopted to ensure that prisoner may not be placed in solitary confinement unless:

1. The prisoner poses an immediate and substantial risk of physical harm to the security of the facility, to himself or herself, or to others that is not the result of a serious mental illness;
2. All other less-restrictive options to address the risk have been attempted and exhausted;
3. The prisoner is held in solitary confinement only for the minimum time required to address the risk, and for a period of time that does not compromise his or her mental and physical health of the prisoner.

Will this Work?

On September 29, 2015, the Vera Institute of Justice convened a short meeting to explore what a few states are learning about how to end over-reliance on extended solitary confinement in correctional systems. Researcher Craig Haney reminded attendees why this is essential. He noted that a robust literature on mental and physical harms of the practice shows it can lead to despair and anger, destabilization of the sense of self, and a loss of ability to relate to others. It can also amplify symptoms of mental illness.

Shaka Senhor, who spent a total of 7 years in solitary confinement, vividly evoked the experience and pointed out that the damaged people subjected to it may one day be “somebody’s neighbor.” He stressed that “we have every tool available to make the right decision” and challenged policy makers to move toward change. [Read the full meeting report here.](#)

Some states and communities are leading positive change in the U.S. The Vera Institute heard from executives in Colorado, Washington, and New Mexico, as well as the Hampden County Correctional

Center, that it is possible to reduce over-reliance on solitary confinement, advance the interests of public safety, and make prison settings safer.

Learn More!

What Can Reforming Solitary Confinement Teach Us About Reducing Mass Incarceration?

It's not about non-violent offenders. And it won't be cheap. [Read the full report from the Marshall Project.](#)

Safe Alternatives to Solitary Confinement: U.S. Leaders Share Progress and Insights. On September 29, 2015, the Vera Institute of Justice convened a short meeting to explore what a few states are learning about how to end over-reliance on extended solitary confinement in correctional systems. Researcher Craig Haney reminded attendees why this is essential. He noted that a robust literature on mental and physical harms of the practice shows it can lead to despair and anger, destabilization of the sense of self, and a loss of ability to relate to others. [Read the full meeting report here.](#)

What is solitary confinement? The American Friends Service Committee provides [facts](#), a video, and resources.

IAHR. [Interfaith Action for Human Rights](#) focuses on reducing practices that violate human dignity within the mid-Atlantic region, including prolonged solitary confinement.

Is it torture? The National Religious Campaign Against Torture, a coalition of over 300 religious organizations – including representatives from Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, evangelical Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Quaker, Unitarian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh communities– is committed to abolishing prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. prisons. This [report to the United Nations](#) explains why.