

# TORTURE IS ALWAYS WRONG

## The End Solitary Confinement Act (H.R. 4972)

*A bill to stop torture, save lives, and improve safety for everyone*

**Solitary confinement is a form of torture.** It is linked to self-mutilation, suicide, heart disease, anxiety, depression, psychosis, mental and physical deterioration, and a significantly heightened risk of death.<sup>1</sup> Placement in solitary for any length of time, whether days or even hours, can cause severe harm. In spite of this harsh reality, over 11,000 people are held in solitary confinement each day in federal prisons alone.<sup>2</sup> Experts estimate that over 122,000 people are locked in solitary each day across federal and state corrections facilities and local jails, with additional people locked in immigration detention facilities.<sup>3</sup> As with other aspects of our criminal legal system, the United States is an outlier among advanced democracies in its widespread use of solitary confinement.<sup>4</sup>





There is widespread and bipartisan public support for banning solitary confinement. Recent polling shows a majority of voters across the country and political spectrum support federal legislation ending solitary confinement entirely beyond a limit of four hours and only allowing its use following an emergency situation involving serious physical injury, including **78 percent of Democrats, 61 percent of Independents, and 51 percent of Republicans.**<sup>5</sup> President Biden and Vice President Harris also pledged to end solitary confinement during the 2020 campaign.<sup>6</sup>

**In alignment with public opinion and the President and Vice President's commitment, the End Solitary Confinement Act (H.R. 4972) was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Cori Bush, Adriano Espaillat, Jamaal Bowman, Rashida Tlaib, and Bonnie Watson Coleman and has garnered 20 House cosponsors. It has received the endorsement of more than 170 organizations nationwide, including more than 30 faith organizations. This historic legislation will stop torture, save lives, and improve safety for everyone.** Drawing from best policies, practices and expert recommendations from across the country regarding youth facilities, mental health facilities, and adult corrections facilities, this bill would:

**End solitary confinement in federal prisons, jails and other detention settings with limited exceptions, including a 4 hour maximum for emergency de-escalation.**

- Bans solitary confinement in federal facilities with limited exceptions at night for count or sleep, during the day for count or other required facility business, for purposes of medical quarantine or isolation, for emergency de-escalation, and as part of a necessary lockdown.
- For any instance of confinement for emergency de-escalation, requires facility staff to meet with the person at least once an hour to attempt de-escalation, work toward release from confinement, and determine the necessity of continuing to hold the person in isolation.
- Provides additional protections against placing vulnerable populations in solitary.

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**Allow for longer-term separation from the general facility population while ensuring all people incarcerated in federal facilities have meaningful access to out-of-cell time and group programming.**

- Requires all people incarcerated in federal facilities to have access to at least 14 hours of daily meaningful group out-of-cell time, including at least 7 hours of daily group programming.
- Allows temporary placement in alternative units and requires all people separated from the general facility population to have access to out-of-cell, congregate, trauma-informed, therapeutic programming.
- Requires access to programming such as educational, vocational, mental health, violence prevention, alcohol and substance use treatment, and reentry programming. Other out-of-cell time can include at least one hour daily of out-of-cell congregate recreation and other unstructured out-of-cell congregate activities, including religious programming, volunteer groups, time in a day room, meals, library and law library, work assignments, visits, social and legal telephone calls, contact visitation, and access to personal property and commissary.

**Impose strict due process protections, including access to representation and neutral decision-makers.**

- Prohibits any person incarcerated in a federal facility from being placed in an alternative unit unless and until it is determined in writing, following a placement hearing with a neutral decision-maker and access to representation, that the person engaged in grave and dangerous behavior that resulted in injury or poses severe risk to others.
- Prohibits any person from being placed in restraints except in narrow circumstances involving conduct that has resulted in injury or poses severe risk to others.
- Prohibits punitive limitations on basic needs and services.

**Create oversight and enforcement mechanisms, including mandatory reporting, a private cause of action, oversight by a community monitoring body, and enhanced media access.**

- Mandates public reporting on self-harm and suicide; use, duration and demographic breakdowns of confinement for emergency de-escalation; and alternative units.
- Establishes a community monitoring body empowered to investigate individual complaints and systemic issues, including by unannounced visits, in-person interviews, document requests, and confidential communications with incarcerated people.
- Provides additional oversight through a private right of action and news media access to federal carceral facilities.

**Incentivize states and municipalities to adopt similar bans on solitary confinement.**

- Decreases certain federal funds allocated to any state or local entity that does not implement similar bans on solitary confinement.

*For more information and to get your faith community involved, contact Laura Markle Downton, M.Div. ([ldownton@nrcat.org](mailto:ldownton@nrcat.org)), NRCAT's Director of Faith and Community Engagement with the Federal Anti-Solitary Taskforce.*

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<sup>1</sup> [The Impacts of Solitary Confinement](#)

<sup>2</sup> [BOP Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> [2023 Calculating Torture Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Washington Post Op-Ed](#)

<sup>5</sup> [A Bipartisan Majority of Voters Support Strongly Restricting Solitary Confinement, Including Placing a Four-Hour Limit on the Practice](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Joe Biden's Criminal Justice Policy](#)