

Human Rights Day 2013 Toolkit

This year marks the 65th anniversary of adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, commemorated by the world community each year on December 10th. On this day, as people of faith who acknowledge the importance of protecting the God-given dignity of every human being, we reaffirm the Universal Declaration's statement that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

With the theme "Confronting Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration," the National Religious Campaign Against Torture invites you and your congregation, campus ministry, or religious organization to lift up the estimated 80,000 of our brothers and sisters held in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and detention centers. We encourage you to observe Human Rights Day during worship services, as a part of your religious education efforts and through advocacy activities during either the weekend of December 6-8, December 13-15, or another time of your choosing.

We invite you to lift up incarcerated people, many with mental illness, and including our youth, who are kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day (sometimes for years, even decades), in cells where the lights shine 24/7. In a nation with the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with over 2.3 million imprisoned in a system that criminalizes communities of color and the poor, we are called to replace torture with restoration. Solitary confinement, and its horrendous physical and spiritual consequences, is an inhumane practice that the faith community must work to end.

Ozlem Ayse Ozgur



TOOLKIT

A **Poster** for promotion of Human Rights Day is available in two formats:

- 8.5" by 11" PDF: See page 2 below or download at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-poster
- 8.5" by 11" Word document: For you to customize as needed, available at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-poster-word

A **Bulletin insert** with educational material and an interfaith prayer:

- See pages 3-4 or download at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-bulletin-insert

Activity and Advocacy ideas

- See pages 5-8 (includes national, CA and NY-specific) or download at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-activities

Talking points for integrating the reality of solitary confinement into sermons and prayers during worship

- See pages 9-12 or download at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-talking-points

Other **Worship and Study Resources** are available at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-resources

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact:

Paz Artaza-Regan, our Director of Program & Outreach at partaza-regan@nrcat.org, or

Laura Markle Downton, our Director of U.S. Prisons Policy & Program at lmarkle@nrcat.org

Sarah McCune



HUMAN RIGHTS DAY






DECEMBER 10TH 2013

Confronting Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration

www.nrcat.org/HRD2013

On December 10th, 2013, the world community will commemorate the 65th anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the United Nations Universal Declaration. On this day, as people of faith, we reaffirm the universal call to protect the God-given dignity of every human being.

LEARN. PRAY. ACT.

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National Religious Campaign
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A PRAYER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Giver of community, who weaves together our human family,
Intending us for fellowship with one another,
We pray for our sisters and brothers imprisoned in isolation for
months and years,
Denied all opportunity for connection and reconciliation.
In place of vengeance, we pray for the courage to create
opportunities for healing.

Giver of life, who charges us with the care of the children in our
midst,
Intending for them a future of possibility and potential,
We pray for the young people in our community who are locked
away,
Denied access to nurturance, education and guidance.
In place of neglect, we pray for the wisdom to create opportunities for
growth.

Giver of day and night, of daily cycles of wake and rest,
Intending for us balance and fulfillment,
We pray for all held in windowless cells, with lights left on night and
day.
In place of fear, we pray for the strength to create opportunities for
restoration.

Giver of dignity and sacred worth in each life,
Intending for us experiences marked by respect and safety,
We pray for all who endure violation in mind, body and spirit,
In place of violation, we pray for the boldness to create communities
of wholeness.

By Laura Markle Downton, NRCAT

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture mobilizes people of faith to end torture in U.S. policy, practice and culture. We are a coalition of over 325 diverse religious organizations from national entities to local congregations across the country.



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Confronting Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration

On December 10, 2013, the world community commemorates the 65th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we reaffirm the commitments of the Declaration and consider statistics like 80,000 people in the U.S. criminal justice system are held in solitary confinement, we especially remember: “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

The severe psychological effects of solitary confinement include hallucinations, paranoia, and increased rates of self-mutilation and suicide. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, has stated that to keep an adult in solitary confinement for more than 15 days constitutes torture, and has called for a prohibition on the use of solitary confinement for youth and those with mental illness.

People of color are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration and solitary confinement. For example, in New York, African Americans account for roughly 14% of the state population, but 59% of the solitary confinement population and 50% of the overall prison population.

Prolonged solitary confinement is a form of torture taking place every day in U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers. The international community has taken steps to classify long-term solitary confinement as torture, and thereby a violation of basic human rights. The continued use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons is a violation of the God-given dignity of every human being, a value enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

People of faith have a critical role to play in ending this egregious form of torture. Go to www.nrcat.org/stopsolitary to sign NRCAT's statement against solitary confinement. When we reach 500 signatures from your state, we will send the statement to your governor and top corrections official, along with every member of your state's legislature.

To learn more and sign NRCAT's statement against solitary confinement, go to: www.nrcat.org/StopSolitary



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Human Rights Day 2013

Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration

Action and Advocacy

To commemorate the 65th anniversary of the adoption and proclamation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Day (December 10th), we call upon our brothers and sisters of faith to rally together to end the abusive use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons.

What the Faith Community Can Do

Sign and Distribute NRCAT's Statement Against Prolonged Solitary Confinement

Ending long-term solitary confinement starts with your signature. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) gathers endorsements from people of faith nationally for a statement calling on government officials all across the country to take steps to end the use of prolonged solitary confinement. When we reach 500 endorsers from a particular state, we will send the statement, along with the list of those endorsers, to that state's governor and top corrections official, along with every member of that state's legislature.

Add your signature online, or download the hardcopy for distribution in your congregation or community, at www.nrcat.org/solitary.

Show *Solitary Confinement: Torture in Your Backyard* in Your Congregation

NRCAT created a 20-minute film, *Solitary Confinement: Torture in Your Backyard* to engage religious communities in confronting solitary confinement across the country. You will hear from survivors of solitary confinement, including Sarah Shourd, one of three American hikers arrested in Iran, who was held in solitary confinement for 14 months. The film discusses how the religious community in Maine helped support a 70% reduction in the number of Maine prisoners held in solitary confinement.

For more information and to access the film and other resources, visit www.nrcat.org/backyard.

In commemoration of Human Rights Day, also consider hosting a film screening or series, featuring additional videos about solitary confinement and mass incarceration: www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-resources.

Join a State Campaign to End Prolonged Solitary Confinement

NRCAT supports state partner organizations in their work to educate the faith community about the abusive use of solitary confinement and to advocate for legislation to end its use. In states where NRCAT does not have a designated local partner, but legislation or other significant efforts to limit solitary confinement are underway, NRCAT informs people of faith about these efforts and provides advocacy tools. For more information on state campaigns, go to www.nrcat.org/states.

Organize a Reading or Production of "If the SHU Fits"

"If the SHU Fits" shares voices of survivors of solitary confinement and their loved ones. This resource powerfully weaves together excerpts of letters, blog entries, government reports, and speeches of family members and survivors, all organized into a one-hour Reader's Theatre Format. To learn more and download the script, go to www.nrcat.org/if-the-shu-fits.



National Religious Campaign
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Human Rights Day 2013

Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration Statewide Action across California

In the summer of 2013, **over 30,000 incarcerated people** in California began a historic hunger strike to protest the inhumane conditions of long-term solitary confinement in California prisons. Hundreds fasted for 60 consecutive days. On Thursday, September 5, the 60th day of the hunger strike, it was suspended. As a result of the hunger strike, a series of joint legislative hearings have begun in California to address the issues raised by the hunger strike.

Approximately 12,000 incarcerated people are held in solitary confinement each day in California prisons, denied basic human rights like fresh air, sunshine, or human contact. These prisoners are held in solitary for an average of 6.8 years, with hundreds held for more than 10 years, and dozens for more than 20 years. California's use of solitary confinement is indefinite, with no clear pathway to release from isolation. *The religious community has an important role to play in supporting continued efforts to end torture in California prisons:*

Learn about the issues

- Background information at www.nrcat.org/ca-hunger-strike-2013
- Read the 2012 Call to End Hostilities: <http://bit.ly/1ar22Pe>
- Watch and share video excerpts from the first hearing: <http://youtu.be/fqXFd7sz-Jw>
- Sign up for regular updates from the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity: <http://bit.ly/1a5yHpe>

Show your support

- Sign the NRCAT statement to end solitary confinement: www.nrcat.org/solitary
- Sign a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown urging him to abolish indefinite solitary confinement in California: <http://bit.ly/12yGxVY>
- Join the Emergency Response Network for updates and action items from the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Network: <http://bit.ly/16wj9A1>
- Write a letter to an incarcerated person: www.nrcat.org/letter-writing-project

Contact California public officials

- CA State Senator Loni Hancock and Assemblymember Tom Ammiano have held the first in a series of legislative hearings on solitary confinement in response to the historic hunger strike. Encourage your local representative to support the abolition of solitary confinement: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov>
- Call the California Department of Corrections and voice your concerns about the use of solitary confinement at (916) 324-3397.

Plan an event with your congregation

- Distribute educational materials in your faith community or neighborhood: <http://bit.ly/18QkD6U>
- Show a video and facilitate a discussion in your faith community: www.nrcat.org/backyard
- Invite a NRCAT representative to present the issues to your faith community and facilitate a discussion: Email Steve Smith stevensmith1@fuller.edu or Virginia Classick vclassick@aol.com

Join vigils across the state to end long term solitary confinement in CA prisons and jails

- Attend vigil in Arcata, CA, Thursdays at 5 pm, and a vigil in Oakland, CA, Fridays at 5 pm
More details can be found at www.prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com/take-action



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Human Rights Day 2013

Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration

Statewide Action across New York State

*Join the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) and
National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)
in Confronting Solitary Confinement as Torture this Human Rights Day, December 10.*

What You Need to Know About Solitary in NY

Solitary Confinement is Inhumane, Counterproductive, and an Extension of Mass Incarceration

People in isolated confinement spend 22 to 24 hours a day locked in a cell the size of an elevator, alone or with one other person. They may be permitted one hour to exercise alone in a cage. They do not receive any meaningful programs or therapy, and cannot make phone calls. The sensory deprivation, lack of normal human interaction, and extreme idleness can lead to intense suffering and severe psychological damage.

People of Color are Disproportionately Held in Solitary Confinement

On any given day, as many as 4,200 men, women, and children are in solitary confinement and other forms of extreme isolation in New York State prisons. Thousands of others are in solitary in other local city and county jails across the state, as well as in Federal prisons and immigration detention centers in the state. Black and Latino men, women, and children are held in isolation at even more disproportionate rates than in the general prison population. The vast majority of people in isolation are there because of alleged non-violent conduct.

People are in Solitary Confinement for Months, Years, and Even Decades

New York places **no limit** on time in solitary confinement. Most people sent to isolation spend months or years there. Some individuals have been in solitary confinement in New York's prisons for more than two decades. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has denounced solitary confinement exceeding 15 days.

Even Particularly Vulnerable Groups are Subjected to Solitary Confinement

Children or people with mental illness fare even worse in "the box"—yet they are disproportionately likely to end up there. Even pregnant women, elderly people, and people with severe physical disabilities are held in isolation in NYS. Members of the LGBTQI community have suffered additional staff abuse by being placed in solitary confinement.

What CAIC Demands that Our Officials Do

- **Fundamentally transform the response to people's needs and problematic behaviors**, from deprivation and isolation to additional support, programs, and therapy. The response, both in prisons and our communities, must be one that is humane and effective.
- **Stop placing people in solitary confinement.**
- **At a minimum, ensure no person is ever held in isolated confinement beyond 15 days**, and drastically restrict the criteria that can result in such placement.
- **Never place particularly vulnerable people in solitary for even one day**, including the young, elderly, or pregnant, those with a disability or mental health need, or who identify as LGBTQI.

What You Can Do and Can Encourage Others to Do on Human Rights Day

LEARN the facts about solitary and other forms of prison isolation in New York at:

www.nycaic.org
www.nycjac.org

www.boxedinny.org

www.correctionalassociation.org

www.solitarywatch.com

www.nrcat.org/ny-prisons

JOIN the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement at www.nycaic.org. CAIC holds monthly meetings in person and by teleconference and engages in action, vigils, workshops, and advocacy. Please sign up for our monthly email newsletter at www.eepurl.com/CjxOv, or join a working listserv by sending an email to ny_caic-subscribe@lists.riseup.net. You can also follow CAIC on Twitter www.twitter.com/nycaic or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NYCAIC.

SHARE a story on your Facebook from CAIC's Facebook page www.facebook.com/NYCAIC.

SHARE a narrative on CAIC's Facebook/website about how solitary confinement has impacted you or a friend or family member. You can email such narratives to Suzanne Koneschusky at SKoneschusky@urbanjustice.org.

WRITE to your state legislators and to the following officials demanding an end to the torture of isolated confinement. Please incorporate your own experiences and choose two or three of the above facts and/or demands to incorporate as well:

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Mr. Thomas P. Abt
Deputy Secretary for Public
Safety
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Mr. Anthony J. Annucci
Acting Commissioner
NYS DOCCS
1220 Washington Avenue,
Building 2
Albany, New York 12226

JOIN OR ORGANIZE A VIGIL to end the torture of solitary confinement in NY prisons & jails:

- Come out for a CAIC vigil in New York City on the evening of Dec. 10. For more details, contact Suzanne Koneschusky at SKoneschusky@urbanjustice.org or 646-459-3044.
- Come out to a CAIC vigil on Long Island. For more details, contact Claire Deroche at CDeroche@uucsr.org or 516-472-2977.
- Organize or join a vigil in other parts of the state. If you are interested, please contact Suzanne Koneschusky at SKoneschusky@urbanjustice.org or 646-459-3044.

PREPARE a Sermon, film screening, or Discussion Group at your congregation during the weekends before/after the 10th. NRCAT has prayers and resources available at www.nrcat.org/human-rights-day.



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture



Human Rights Day 2013

Solitary Confinement in an Age of Mass Incarceration

Sermon Notes

KEY FACTS

- With 5% of the world's population, the U.S. accounts for **25% of the world's incarcerated**.
- The United States holds **more prisoners in long-term solitary confinement** than any other nation.
- On any given day, more than **80,000 incarcerated people**, including women, men and youth, are held in solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers. Of these, **25,000 are held in supermax prisons**- facilities made up solely, or mostly, of solitary cells.¹
- Over the last 30 years, the size of the federal prison system has **increased nearly 800 percent**, largely due to the overrepresentation of those convicted of drug offenses, many of whom are low-level and non violent. The combination of "harsh sentences for drug possession, three-strikes laws that greatly increase the imposition of life terms, and the 'supermax' system of long-term, solitary confinement" have coalesced to produce the bloated prison system we face today.²
- **Forty-five percent** of those held in supermax prisons have "serious mental illness, marked by symptoms or psychological breakdowns."³
- People of color are disproportionately impacted by incarceration and solitary confinement. African Americans constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated in U.S. prisons, and are incarcerated at **nearly six times** the rate of whites.⁴

In Solitary
Left all alone with your thoughts
Every day is night.

~ Marie Lehlitner



- According to *Unlocking America*, if African American and Latinos were incarcerated at the same rates as white individuals, today's prison and jail populations would decline by approximately 50%. If current trends continue, **one in three** black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.
- Though there are outright bans on the punitive solitary confinement of juveniles in Alaska, Connecticut, Maine, Oklahoma and West Virginia, **youth in most states are not protected** from placement in solitary confinement.
- The U.S. Supreme Court first attempted to declare solitary confinement unconstitutional **in 1890**.

HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

In 1945 when the United Nations was created, its charter affirmed the “dignity and worth of the human person.” On December 10, 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirmed this basic tenet of the UN charter. The nations of the world now celebrate December 10 as Human Rights Day. There are 30 short articles in the UDHR. The first article states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and human rights.” The third article adds, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”

Article 5 states clearly, “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” So the prohibition against torture derives from the agreement by the nations in the UN that the principle of honoring the dignity of human beings – a principle shared by all major religions – is an underlying principle for both nations and individuals. Thirty-six years later, on December 10, 1984, the UN General Assembly adopted the text of the [Convention Against Torture](#), an international treaty ratified by the U.S. in 1994.

December 10, 2013 will be the 65th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

TESTIMONIALS

“Phillip J.”, who spent approximately 113 days in solitary confinement (including a single period of 60 days) **before his eighteenth birthday**, said, “I was stressed. At first I would sleep all day. I would feel myself getting angry or aggressive. I would try to work out or do something, but I was literally going insane in that little spot. The claustrophobia set in and I would feel I was having anxiety attacks and would go over and get water and try and calm down. I would hear the slightest noise and be on guard.”

Source: Human Rights Watch interview with Phillip J. (pseudonym), Florida, April 2012. *Growing Up Locked Down*, Pg. 26.

The following is excerpted from a letter dated July 15, 2001, to Bonnie Kerness, Director of the American Friends Service Committee’s Prison Watch. The author is a **45- year-old mother of three** who was housed in the segregation unit of a New Jersey prison: “I never seen the sky, or felt the warmth of the sun, or a breeze pass by me, the trees and grass or a rain drop. **I never knew how painful it could be to be denied nature itself.** I had a small narrow window which does not open, but all I could see was brick walls and nothing more. I remember from those brick walls was a small plant growing from within the cracks of the brick that was my only part of nature that gave me hope. As the wind would blow against the leaves of this plant, I would actually close my eyes and pretend this very wind was blowing against my face. I know it sounds crazy, but it was the only part of nature that I had.

Then one day I could not stand it and I so desperately need to feel real air, so I started to scrape the seal from the window with my finger tips, I was determined to make an opening. For three months of every day I scraped and scraped where my fingers bled, but I managed to make a very small opening and I only had room to place one side of my nose against this opening at a time and I would take such a deep breath where I was finally able to inhale a very small amount of air but it was all I needed in order to survive...”

Source: *Confronting Confinement*, from the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, 2006. Page 57.

“Adrian,” a 26-year-old, is spending **more than 1,600 consecutive days** (over 4 years) in solitary confinement, or a “Special Housing Unit” (SHU) at Southport Correctional Facility in Pine City, NY. Since his arrival there in February 2011, Adrian has spent 23 to 24 hours a day alone. Although Adrian dreams of life outside of solitary, with a photo of an executive’s corner office on his wall, he does not have access to educational programs or vocational training. Like nearly 2,000 other New York prisoners each year, Adrian will be released from solitary confinement directly to the street.

Source: “Boxed In: The True Cost of Extreme Isolation in New York’s Prisons” Page 5.

“The light in cell is blinding. It reminds me of old war torture tactics. It hurts your eyes and gives you migraines. I’ve seen medical for migraines and am due to receive glasses for damage to retina. Only noises we hear are the **screams of mental patients** of which there are many...The CO’s are liable to do any level of undignifying acts to you at any given time. It’s constant worry and unease. It makes one feel so helpless and vulnerable and you never know what tragedy may affront you today. At first I slept too much, now I rarely sleep. The loud screams and banging and kicking on doors make it difficult. Plus I’m always attentive to CO keys and the possibility that they’re coming for me.”

Source: *Torture in U.S. Prisons: Evidence of Human Rights Violations 2nd Edition*, American Friends Service Committee Northeast Region Healing Justice Program, Ed. Bonnie Kerness and Beth Breslaw, Prison Watch. Quoting from: Human Rights Coalition-Fed Up Chapter Institutionalized Cruelty p.23, Lawyer L, SCI Dallas Restricted Housing Unit (confinement), Jackson Township PA (undated).

THEOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS TO SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

THE STORY OF JONAH: Although Jonah’s obedience to God took hold during his solitary time in the whale, the experience left him enraged and desperate—similar to the mental state of prisoners in solitary. His *teshuvah* did not take place **until his isolation was abolished** through a conversation with God. God engaged Jonah’s humanity to explain just like all of us—children, prisoners—he too depends on mercy. [For the full article, click here.](#)

DISTINGUISHING THE ACT FROM THE PERSON: Within the Jewish faith, there is a strong differentiation between the crime and the perpetrator, and a **strong belief in spiritual renewal**, even for those who have committed heinous crimes. If a person is tortured, this spiritual renewal cannot occur.

PRESBYTERIAN RESOLUTION: The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) passed a resolution recognizing the use of solitary confinement can be a form of torture. This comes from the shared Christian belief in inherent human dignity from **creation in God’s image**, and from the church’s realization that solitary confinement can be torture. [For the full article, click here.](#)

CALIFORNIA CATHOLIC BISHOPS: The California Catholic Bishops oppose the use of solitary confinement as it serves “**no restorative or rehabilitative purpose.**” [For more information, click here.](#)

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY: “Let there arise from you a **community inviting to all that is good**, advocating for what is right, and advocating against what is wrong, they are the ones who attain felicity” (Quran 3:104). Prisoners in solitary confinement are stripped of community.

JUMUA’AH: Within the Islamic faith, the noon congregational call to prayer on Fridays is **communal**. Individuals placed in solitary confinement are denied a communal prayer setting.

SHALOM, PEACE AND AL-SALAAM: Shalom, a greeting of peace, speaks to perfection and wholeness within Judaism. Peace manifests through Jesus' call for the unconditional love of all people. Al-Salaam is an attribute of God, meaning peace, security, and reconciliation. All Abrahamic faiths are united in **belief in peace and community**, concepts inherently at odds with the practice of solitary confinement, which disrupts peace, encourages violence and is devoid of community.

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION: Many individuals are being held in solitary confinement, subjected to **inhumane and unconstitutional conditions** because of their religious identity. This is especially true regarding targeted individuals of the Muslim faith in the wake of 9/11.

Other **Worship and Study Resources**
including prayers
are available at www.nrcat.org/hrd2013-resources

¹ Human Rights Watch (2003). "Ill-Equipped: US Prisons and Offenders with Mental Illness." July 16, 2012.

² "The Resistible Rise and Predictable Fall of the U.S. Supermax" by Stephen F. Eisenman, *Monthly Review*, 2009, Volume 61, Issue 06 (November).

³ Correctional Association of New York, "States that Provide Mental Health Alternatives to Solitary Confinement."

⁴ NAACP Criminal Justice Fact Sheet: <http://www.naACP.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>