



## National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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March 31, 2016

The Honorable Loni Hancock  
Chair, Senate Public Safety  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 1143 (Leno)**  
**Position: Support**

Dear Senator Hancock:

On behalf of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), I write in strong support for SB 1143 by Senator Mark Leno, a bill that would limit the immoral practice of placing youth in room confinement in California's juvenile facilities. NRCAT is a national interfaith membership organization comprised of more than 300 religious organizations including national denominational and religious institutions, regional entities such as state ecumenical agencies, and local religious organizations and congregations representing the evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, mainline Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Bahá'í, and Buddhist faith traditions. NRCAT works with interfaith partners to mobilize a moral voice for human rights and an end to torture in U.S. policy, practice and culture. Our work to end torture in U.S. prisons, jails and detention centers is focused on promoting humane alternatives to solitary confinement, a practice that is immoral and in violation of our shared religious values of community and restorative justice.

SB 1143 will set nationally recognized best standards into law regarding the use of room confinement in juvenile facilities. This bill is in keeping with efforts in several other states to limit the use of room confinement in favor of less restrictive options that have demonstrated greater success in promoting facility safety and improved outcomes for youth.

Specifically, SB 1143, would bring these urgently needed reforms:

- Define room confinement as the placement of a youth in a locked sleep room or cell alone with minimal or no contact with persons other than correctional staff or attorneys. It does not include brief periods of confinement necessary for required institutional operations or sleeping hours.
- Provide that room confinement shall only be used when all other less restrictive options have been attempted and exhausted and not to the extent that it compromises the mental and physical health of the youth.
- Provide that a youth shall only be held in room confinement for the maximum time of four hours at which point the youth would have to be returned to general programming, placed in individualized programming, or staff shall consult with mental health staff. Any room confinement beyond four hours will require documentation, an individualized program, and the approval of the facility superintendent every four hours thereafter.

As people of faith and conscience, we urge you to support this bill. The many faith traditions that comprise our campaign share a belief in the inherent dignity of each child and adult and the importance of fostering the health, potential and growth of every child. Not only does room confinement of youth disrupt developmental progress, it demonstrates a fundamental failure to provide youth with the tools for a future of possibility, recovery, dignity and hope.

Earlier this year, President Obama fundamentally questioned the practice of solitary confinement, describing it as “an affront to our common humanity.” He issued a Presidential Memorandum to limit the use of isolation which includes limits in federal juvenile facilities to a maximum of three hours, and a ban on its use for the purposes of punishment or discipline. More than 20 states have banned the use of isolation for the purposes of punishment.

This bill, sponsored by juvenile justice experts and advocates, recognizes the importance of education, programming and other pro-social activities that help improve outcomes for youth and meet the rehabilitative goals of the juvenile justice system. SB 1143 (Leno) offers California a historic opportunity to lead the country in setting nationally recognized best standards to improve youth outcomes. For the sacred worth of each child, we support SB 1143 and strongly urge your support as well.

Sincerely,



Rev. Laura Markle Downton  
Director, U.S. Prisons Policy & Program  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture

cc: Senator Mark Leno (heather.hopkins@sen.ca.gov)  
Jennifer Kim, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (jennifer@ellabakercenter.org)