

September 7, 2023

Re: Support the California Mandela Act on Solitary Confinement

Dear Governor Newsom,

We write to you as leading California religious organizations representing a diversity of faith communities throughout our state. Over the last two years we have been supporting an effort to place limits on the use of solitary confinement in California jails, prisons, and private immigrant detention facilities. We are writing to state our support for AB 280, the California Mandela Act by Assemblymember Chris Holden and urge you to support this important human rights initiative.

We commend your efforts to reform California's prisons and end policies of mass incarceration. We applaud your support for the reduction of California's prison population, and the closure of certain facilities that are no longer necessary. We also applaud your efforts to reimagine San Quentin as a facility that is focused more on rehabilitation rather than punishment. However, we believe that none of these policies can stand on their own unless they provide an alternative to the unchecked use of solitary confinement.

Solitary confinement is broadly recognized as torture by the United Nations, leading medical and mental health experts, and governors of other states like New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey who have signed Mandela-like bills legislating a ban on prolonged isolation in the past four years. These governors, and their state legislative bodies, have found that limiting the use of solitary confinement in state prisons, jails, and detention centers does not compromise safety inside these facilities, and in fact can make them safer for both staff and incarcerated individuals.

The California Mandela Act provides important baselines for all detention facilities in our state and would add California to the growing list of states that are respecting the human rights and dignity of people who are incarcerated. In 2013, more than 30,000 people inside California prisons organized a hunger strike against the use of solitary confinement, while communities of faith and religious leaders nationwide demonstrated our support and unity. At that time, the hunger strikers were urged to suspend their hunger strike in order for the legislature and the state to find solutions to this challenge. Now a decade later, the state has yet to fulfill its promise on this issue. Today, the California Mandela Act seeks to build upon the extensive efforts made by detained individuals, activists, and organizers over the years, aiming to replace the oppressive isolation of solitary confinement with rehabilitation, restorative justice, and community engagement.

Our diverse religious traditions share a common belief that every individual possesses inherent worth and deserves to be treated with dignity. Solitary confinement contradicts the fundamental religious principles of redemption, compassion, and the pursuit of justice that aims to restore individuals and communities.

Solitary confinement is torture. As moral authorities within our state, we implore you to utilize the authority vested in you to put an end to this harmful practice that flagrantly disregards

essential human rights and violates the inherent, divinely bestowed dignity of every individual. We urge you to draw on both your personal faith and your role as a public leader to support the California Mandela Act.

Sincerely,

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Palo Alto
All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena
Archdiocese of LA
Brea Congregational Church
California Catholic Conference
Catholic Diocese of Monterey
Catholic Diocese of San Jose
Clear View Project
Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice
Congregation Shir Hadash, Los Gatos
Creation Spirituality Communities
The Episcopal Public Policy Network of California
First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, UCC
The First Presbyterian Church of San Anselmo
First United Methodist Church, Pasadena
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Glide Memorial Church, San Francisco
Heartmind Teaching
Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, San Jose
Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace
Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County
Justice Revival
Kehilla Community Synagogue, Oakland
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
Nefesh, Los Angeles
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Office of Advocacy & Justice for Immigrants, Catholic Diocese of San Bernardino
Office of Catholic Charities and Social Concerns, Diocese of Sacramento
Office of Life and Justice, Diocese of Oakland
Office of Life, Justice, and Peace, Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange
Office of Restorative Justice, Catholic Diocese of Orange
Or Hamidbar, Palm Springs
Park Presidio United Methodist Church, San Francisco
Sisters of Mercy in California
Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church, San Anselmo
Tapestry, A Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Lake Forest
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The United Methodist Church-General Board of Church and Society