

14 July 2022

Become a co-sponsor of H.R. 8048, the Solitary Confinement Study and Reform Act

Dear Members of Congress,

The undersigned faith-based organizations and members of the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition respectfully request that your office co-sponsor the [Solitary Confinement Study and Reform Act](#), which was [introduced](#) by Congressman David Trone (D-MD) and Congresswoman Stephanie Bice (R-OK).

The Act would create a bipartisan commission focused on studying the effects of solitary confinement in the U.S. prison system. On any given day, tens of thousands of adults and children, a disproportionate number of whom are people of color, are subjected to solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and federal detention centers, in conditions that constitute torture according to the United Nations, leading medical and mental health experts, and other developed countries. As religious organizations and faith leaders, we believe the Act is an important step toward ensuring the safety and health of our communities.

Specifically, the Solitary Confinement Study and Reform Act would:

- Create a bipartisan commission including formerly incarcerated individuals or family members chosen by the President and the majority and minority leaders of both chambers to study the effects of solitary confinement.
- Establish national standards aimed at reducing the use of solitary confinement.
- Require federal agencies that detain or incarcerate individuals to adopt these standards; and
- Incentivize states to adopt the national standards by providing \$20 million in community-based mental health and drug treatment grant funding for those states that comply.

Our various faith traditions hold in common a belief in the inherent dignity and worth of each human person. Complete isolation violates basic religious values of redemption, compassion, and restorative justice.

In solitary, people are often detained in a cell by themselves, or with one other person, for 22 hours per day. This kind of treatment is extremely detrimental to any human being.

- Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture, and the prevalence of prolonged isolation in U.S. prisons and jails must be viewed in relation to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

- Cut off from any normal human interaction, enduring sensory and physical deprivation, many describe the experience as being “buried alive.”
- Research shows even just a few days in solitary can lead to increased risk of death by accident, suicide, violence, and overdose [1].
- Solitary confinement has also been proven to lead to higher recidivism rates [2].
- Medical experts have stated that people incarcerated in isolation for extended periods experience symptoms akin to delirium, and the impact on those with mental and physical disabilities is especially damaging.

Contrary to popular belief that solitary confinement is only used in response to violent behavior, incarcerated people are far more likely to be placed in solitary for non-violent disciplinary reasons, because of a need for protection, or because corrections staff misinterpret their symptoms of mental disability as an act of defiance or rule breaking.

Solitary confinement violates basic principles of human rights and the inherent God-given and Divine human dignity bestowed on all. This is all the worse for people of color, who are disproportionately impacted by exponentially growing incarceration rates. Recent studies have revealed that people of color are even more over-represented in solitary than they are in the prison population in general and receive longer terms in solitary than white people for the same disciplinary infractions.

As people of faith and conscience, we urge you to support this Act as an important step toward addressing this devastating practice.

To become a co-sponsor, please contact Alexander Chanock (alexander.chanock@mail.house.gov) with Representative Trone. Should you have any questions about the bill or the issue of solitary confinement, please do not hesitate to contact Laura Markle Downton, Director of Faith and Community Engagement for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, at ldownton@nrcat.org.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
 African Methodist Episcopal Church
 Alliance of Baptists
 Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
 Church World Service
 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
 The Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
 Council on American-Islamic Relations
 Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Episcopal Church
The Festival Center
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
ICNA Council for Social Justice
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness
Religions for Peace USA
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sojourners
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ Justice and Local Church Ministries
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Read the Federal Blueprint for Ending Solitary Confinement [here](#).

[1] The Lancet, February 2020: [Solitary confinement placement and post-release mortality risk among formerly incarcerated individuals](#); Cornell University, Cornell Chronicle, February 2020: [Solitary confinement heightens post-incarceration death risk](#)

[2] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, July 2017: [Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Use of Restrictive Housing for Inmates with Mental Illness](#)