



National Association of Social Workers
NASW-NYC is Where Social Workers Connect

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In Unison with NASW Maryland Chapter
In Collaboration with Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement (SWASC)

**NASW New York City Chapter Statement in support of
Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act (A. 3080 / S. 3824)
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The National Association of Social Workers, NYC Chapter, supports New York State Assembly Bill A. 3080 and Senate Bill S. 3824 (HALT Solitary Confinement Act), which prevents the Department of Corrections from separating any person from general population for more than 15 continuous days. According to the bill, once separated, prisoners must be placed in a separate secure residential rehabilitation unit (RRU) – a rehabilitative and therapeutic unit aimed at providing additional programs, therapy and support to address underlying needs and causes of behavior, with 6 hours per day of out-of-cell programming plus one hour of out-of-cell recreation. The bill further states that no person may be held in isolated confinement more than 15 consecutive days nor 20 days total in any 60 day period. At these limits, a person must be released or diverted to the alternative RRU with more out-of-cell time, programs, and therapy.

Data shows that in NYS on any given day, roughly 5,000 people are in isolated confinement in NYS prisons; hundreds if not thousands of others are in solitary in local jails. Over 9% of people in NY prisons are in solitary – a rate 40% higher than in the early 2000s in NY, more than double the national average of 4.4%, and four times as high as the 2% reported in states like Colorado and Washington. The majority of sentences that result in isolated confinement in NYS are for non-violent conduct. Black people represent about 13% of all people in NYS, but represent 50% of those incarcerated in NYS, and 60% of people held in long-term solitary confinement units in NY. This data, along with the disproportionate number of Black people

placed in solitary confinement, speaks to why an organization devoted to social justice such as NASW-NYC supports this Bill (*New York Times*, 2016).

Solitary confinement is expensive and harmful to an individual's physical and mental health. The inherent restriction in meaningful social interaction and environmental stimulation and the lack of control adversely impact the health and welfare of all who are held in solitary confinement (*Solitary Watch*, 2017). The World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations, and other international bodies have recognized that solitary confinement is harmful to health. The WHO notes that effects can include gastrointestinal and genitourinary problems, diaphoresis, insomnia, deterioration of eyesight, profound fatigue, heart palpitations, migraines, back and joint pains, weight loss, diarrhea, and aggravation of preexisting medical problems (*Shalev*, 1994).

Even those without a prior history of mental illness may experience a deterioration in mental health, experiencing anxiety, depression, anger, diminished impulse control, paranoia, visual and auditory hallucinations, cognitive disturbances, obsessive thoughts, paranoia, hypersensitivity to stimuli, posttraumatic stress disorder, self-harm, suicide, and/or psychosis when placed in solitary confinement (*National Commission on Correctional Healthcare*, 2016). Some of these effects may even persist after release from solitary confinement. Moreover, the very nature of prolonged social isolation is antithetical to goals of rehabilitation and social integration.

As social workers, we feel that it is not ethically defensible for us as health care professionals to acquiesce silently to conditions of confinement that inflict mental and physical harm. We are ethically obligated, as social workers, to strive to change harmful segregation policies and practices.

Passage of HALT Bill A. 3080 / S. 3824, will help to ensure we are not doing further damage to incarcerated individuals. Please support this bill: Think Outside the Box, New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement <http://nycaic.org>.

References Sourced for this Statement-- #FurtherReadingsandResources

Expert Witness: Health Professional on the Frontline Against Torture Forum, Forham University, GSSS <http://expertwitnessagainsttorture.com/prison-torture-dual-loyalty-conflicts-conference-video/>

Think Outside the Box, New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement

<http://nycaic.org>

National Commission on Correctional Health Care <http://www.ncchc.org/solitary-confinement>

Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement <http://www.socialworkersasc.org/whoweare/>

Solitary Watch <http://solitarywatch.com/facts/faq/>

The Scourge of Racial Bias in New York Prisons, New York Times

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/nyregion/new-york-state-prisons-inmates-racial-bias.html?_r=0

TIME: The Kalief Browder Story <http://www.spike.com/shows/time-the-kalief-browder-story/episode-guide>

World Health Organization Statement on Solitary Confinement:

http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/249194/Prisons-and-Health,-5-Solitary-confinement-as-a-prison-health-issue.pdf