



National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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February 22, 2013

Attention: Krayton Kerns, Chair, Montana House Judiciary Committee
Members of the Montana House Judiciary Committee

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Montana House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a letter in support of House Bill 536 on behalf of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) and our more than 300 diverse faith-based organizational members across the United States. We write to the committee in advance of the hearing scheduled for today, February 22, 2013, to consider House Bill 536, the "Montana Solitary Confinement Act," a bill that would restrict the use of long-term solitary confinement in Montana state prison facilities.

As people of faith, we urge you to support this bill. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture, whose members represent all faith traditions, recognize that prolonged solitary confinement denies the essential human need for community, impedes genuine rehabilitation, and is damaging to the psychological and social development of youth. Research consistently demonstrates that the psychological effects, particularly among children and people with mental illness, are devastating. The damage of solitary confinement is a violation of human dignity and is of grave concern to the faith community. Therefore, we strongly support the passage of House Bill 536, particularly its provisions to end the use of solitary confinement of youth under 18, inmates with serious mental illness, and other prisoners needing special consideration, as well as its support for limiting long-term solitary confinement for all inmates.

The bill also includes a critical public safety measure by limiting the use of solitary confinement for prisoners who are within one year of their release. As people of faith, we recognize that rehabilitation must include preparation for successful re-entry following incarceration. Because of the devastating psychological and social impacts of prolonged solitary confinement, re-entry is significantly undermined by an inmate's immediate release from solitary confinement into the community.

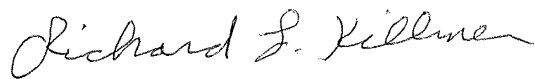
The National Religious Campaign Against Torture advocates for limiting the use of solitary confinement in U.S. federal and state prisons. In 2010, NRCAT partnered with a diverse coalition of organizations in Maine to push for the successful passage of a resolve by the state legislature requiring the Department of Corrections to review its solitary confinement policies and procedures. As a result of the review and its recommendations, the solitary confinement population in Maine has been reduced by more than 70 percent. Momentum to halt the use of prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. prisons continues to build nationally, with the first-ever Congressional hearing on the use of prolonged solitary confinement convened last June by Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois. Following the hearing, in February of this year, the Federal

Bureau of Prisons agreed to the first-ever independent and comprehensive assessment of its use of prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. federal prisons.

In this moment when the use of prolonged solitary confinement is under increasing scrutiny around the country, House Bill 536 presents Montana with a critical opportunity to lead the way nationally in increasing access to rehabilitation and reducing harm.

We urge you to support H.B. 536. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Rev. Richard L. Killmer
Executive Director