



Reassessing Solitary Confinement:
The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences
Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the
Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

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Statement submitted by
**The American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut on behalf of Malcolm
Rahmeen**

**American Civil
Liberties
Union Foundation
Of Connecticut**
330 Main Street
First Floor
Hartford, CT 06106
T/860.523.9146
F/860.586.8900
www.acluct.org

Dear Committee Members:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut applauds the Committee's attention to this important matter. The ACLU of CT receives dozens of letters each year from prisoners at Northern Correctional Institution, Connecticut's supermax prison. These letters describe the acute distress, as well as the hopes, of the men, some of whom have been confined in isolation for more than a decade.

We wish to provide a brief statement by Malcolm Rahmeen, who was incarcerated at Northern from December 2010 until his release in March 2012. Mr. Rahmeen, who has a long and documented history of depression, suicide attempts, and substance abuse, attempted suicide three times during his stay at Northern. We are glad to report that the Department of Correction has begun to make reforms to its classification system, leading to some reduction in the number of people held at Northern. Nonetheless, many prisoners remain in conditions similar to those described below, and Mr. Rahmeen's words stand as a testament to the grave harms that prolonged social and sensory deprivation entail, as well as to the human spirit needed to overcome them.

Since my confinement at Northern Correctional Institution began, I have seen and heard enough of the negative and destructive to last me, or any man, a lifetime. I was first transferred to Northern on 12/03/10. Northern is Connecticut's supermax Prison, where inmates are generally in solitary confinement, in what is called the Administrative Segregation Program, or ASP. The Administrative Segregation Program (ASP) at Northern is a minimum of 305 days in duration, or 7,200 hours. Out of 7,200 hours, ASP prisoners spend 6,807 hours in a 7 x 12 foot cell. Less than 20 of these 7,200 hours are dedicated to any sort of rehabilitation-related programming.

ASP prisoners are afforded only a small view of the outside world for this period—through a 3 foot by 5 inch slit in their cells. That’s it. We were not allowed to have or watch any TV. To exit the cell for exercise, phone calls, or visits, the ASP population at Northern must endure cavity searches. While in “Phase One” of the ASP, a prisoner is required to bathe with iron “Smith and Wesson” shackles clamped on his ankles. During my time at Northern, I estimate that approximately 40% of the prisoners on my unit were in single cell isolation for *twenty-three* hours a day.

To this day, I do not understand why I was forced to endure those many months at Northern. I was classified as a level 5, which is the highest and considered the most dangerous score in the CDOC. I never assaulted a CDOC employee. I never assaulted a prisoner in the CDOC. I never set fire, tried to escape or was ever charged with possessing contraband while in the CDOC. I never destroyed state property while in the CDOC, save for two incidents while I was on suicide watch placement.

On December 11, 2010, just 8 days after I had arrived at Northern, I was placed on suicide watch. I was placed in Cell 101 on Cell Block 1, in a “strip cell”, which is no different from a regular cell, save for the top iron bunk bed and the table-stool unit being removed. On suicide watch, we were often left in handcuffs, shackles, tether-chain and pad-lock, for hours and sometimes days on end. The cell was freezing, and it was impossible to properly use the toilet or feed ourselves. After being placed on suicide watch in Cell 101, I was placed on this “in-cell restraint” status, for 24 hours unprotected.

Shortly after this, I witnessed an incident that traumatized me, and truly impressed upon me the conditions at Northern. In February of 2011, I watched a prisoner as he started bashing his head against his cell door window. That man was suffering and had been completely denied the mental health care he needed; he was depressed and hurt, he needed someone to understand. So it seemed to me then, when he started banging his head, that it was more like a cry for help—BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! However, he started to gather rhythm; he gritted his teeth—BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! And I realized that he was self-sedating. The physical pain was quickly becoming preferable to the psychological and emotional pain. I watched him in his agonizing bliss as his tears mixed with blood from his wound.

A prison guard had been by earlier and had seen the prisoner hurting himself, but there was no injury then so the guard kept going. Now he stopped; I could tell by the guard’s profile that for just a brief second he softened and humanity was coming through, but just as quickly as it came it went, and he walked away as if those streams of blood were water. While he walked past my cell I asked him to help the prisoner—he said, “It’s just a little blood.”

In March 2011, I again attempted suicide by hanging. That time, my cries for help were met with a “cell extraction.” Guards rushed into my cell, beat me, and sprayed mace in my face. Following this, I was taken to yet another “strip cell,” placed again on suicide watch, in the same mace covered restraints. I remained hogtied in chains like this for 72 hours. A third suicide attempt in May 2011 met with a similar response. On all three occasions, my days-long confinement in the “strip cell” only exacerbated my mental condition.

At one point, I angrily protested to a corrections officer that “no human being should be treated this way”. He responded, “That’s even considering you are a human being.”

I saw other prisoners accept this notion that they were, or had been made, less than human, and attempt to end their own lives.

This should come as no surprise. Can less than 20 hours of group programs compensate for 6,807 hours of social isolation and reduced environmental stimulation, as well as the repressive cavity and other search and restraint policies? Is this current curriculum prudent, and in its current state, is it worth the communities’ tax dollars and resources? Does the said amount of isolation and sensory deprivation pose a risk to the mental health of its subjects, and thereby, the community at large once these individuals are released directly from that tiny cell into your neighborhood? You cannot isolate chaos and expect rehabilitation.

When prisoners are smearing their blood and feces on walls, eating food out of their toilets; when they are swallowing pens, overdosing, asphyxiating, cutting, and hanging themselves, one should begin, *at the very least*, to do a thorough evaluation to find out what and put in place the reforms needed.

As a man of many mistakes, but even greater dreams and hopes, I am compelled to declare—out of the isolation that enveloped me—that it is time for institutions like Northern to be reformed. I believe in the American ideals of equality and individual dignity, and I know we can—and must—do better.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

Respectfully submitted,

David McGuire
Staff Attorney