June 15, 2012

Dear Chairman Durbin & Ranking Minority Member, Graham.

I am a member of our county board on mental health.

I am a member of the National Alliance on Mental Health and the parent of a young man who suffers from mental illness. Two years ago my son was summarily taken from his bed at a California state mental hospital at 6 am by 6 huge officers who stuffed all of his belongings into garbage bags and ordered him to "sign this paper" and then packed him into a van and drove him for 7 hours to Folsom Prison. My son has never been to prison or convicted of a crime. He is mentally ill. Upon arriving at the prison, he was put into prison clothing and taken off of 3 of the anti-psychotic medications that he had been on because the Dept. of Corrections did not approve of those medications; he was psychotic and suicidal for months thereafter. He could not even understand how to get us the visitor application forms and no one would help us. I finally, after months of begging everyone & anyone from the prison who would talk to me, got two prison staff persons to actually go to his cell and help him to fill in the forms and mail them to us so we could visit him! It still took another month to get approved. finally on the day we went to see him for the first time in months, we were told that we could not see him but they would not say why. I could see by the look on the guard's face that something was wrong and asked the guard if my son had hurt himself; the guard would not look me in the eye. I was right; he had that day tried to commit suicide; he never knew we were going to visit him or that we had arrived at the prison.

Because of his psychotic state, he was unable to understand the letters we wrote to him and thought we had forgotten about him. CDCR has different rules about medications the mentally ill can take from what the Dept. of Mental Health recommends; and CDCR trumps M. H.! Therefore, the mentally ill often do not, cannot, receive the medications that work for them and so they deteriorate and naturally "disobey" the guards and then are charged with a "115" a violation of rules which goes on their record. From the day he entered Folsom, he was immediately put into Solitary Confinement....no contact with others, no cantene, no explanations. After attempting to kill himself twice, he was transferred to Vacaville Medical Facility, supposedly run by the Dept. of Corrections...however, that was not the way it was. Again, CDCR regs rule and trump the DEPT. OF M.H. and my son was again in solitary, often beaten and in restraints for hours and or days at a time. He became more violent, resentful, paranoid, fearful and then they took his visitation away; we could not see him for 7 months. We finally got him transferred back to Folsom where he is still in solitary, but they are trying to help him since I have written numerous complaints to both prisons and other organizations and now have an attorney to represent him.

My son was, illegally in my opinion, dragged off to prison, stripped of all his civil rights, had his medications taken from him, was allowed to decompensate and, yet, remain in solitary confinement to this very day! What gives them the right? My son, who when he was last in the care of the state mental hospital, was on his way to doing much better, was thrown to the wolves and his life ruined even more and any progress made in helping him to deal with life and his mental health was completely lost. When I visit him [behind glass] his eyes are filled with fear and sadness. He tells me he is bad; that he will probably never get out. He has no hope and asks me not to give him any hope! My heart dies a little every time I see him; he MUST get out of that hell-hole and get back into a decent hospital where he might be able to regain whatever progress he was making at the time and perhaps learn how to live again. He is NOT a criminal. He is ill and has no say in whether he has this mental illness or not; it simply is. Welfare & Institutions Code Section 7301 allowed an angry staff person at the state mental hospital to make a case for my son to be taken to prison, without notice, without appeal, without notification to us....What has happened to America that we are now so calloused and unfeeling that we can simply throw people away like this?

Solitary Confinement has become all-to-normal a "punishment" and the length of time given even for minor infractions are far too long to be of any rehabilitative use; it is simply an easy way to get a problematic inmate out of the way, rather then to teach them how to live; how to survive, how to get along with others. There is so much more to say, but not enough space to say it.

I **beg** the members of this committee to look into the thousands of cases where solitary confinement is used daily; the inordinately long periods of time men and women are made to remain in solitary; to see the many studies which clearly show that this form of "treatment" or "behavior modification" does not work to teach the person to be more peaceful but only causes more anger, resentment, mistrust, hatred, rage...and on and on, further endangering the public and the inmate if and when he or she is ever released.

I want my son to have a chance at life and solitary confinement is taking that chance away from him.

Please help us!

Diana J. and Terry L. Montes-Walker

800 Meadow Ave.

Yuba City, CA 95991

loveneverfailswalk@comcast.net

530-671-2826