Dear Chairman Durbin,

I am the mother of a 23 year old son found guilty but mentally ill, serving 27 years at Menard Correctional Center in downstate Illinois.  He continues to have hallucinations and delusions since his arrival into the Illinois Department of Corrections; he has strong reservations against taking psychotropic drugs without the careful monitoring of a physician.  As you must realize, mental health services are in extremely short supply in prison.  My son finds that he remains grounded when he is around other people.  I am terrified that my son could be placed into solitary confinement for some small infraction.  I travel to Menard from the Chicago area every other week, not only to visit my kid, but also to assess his mental status.  It's a 6-hour journey each way, plus hotel bills (since we hit the deer on January 1st this year, I only travel during the daytime).  For every person incarcerated, there is also a family suffering.  My other children and I have regular therapy visits; even so, there are times when Menard goes on lockdown, and I am not allowed to visit my son, I spend the day in bed.  If my son were to be placed in solitary confinement and lose his grip on reality, my entire family would be severely affected.

I have attached a 3-page letter along with a signature sheet, signed by 26 colleagues and myself. We urge you to limit the use of solitary confinement in our prisons, and prevent the further deterioration of mentally ill inmates that lack the capacity to tolerate its detrimental effects.

Sincerely,

Lori Fender APN CNM MS