

## Dangerous Overuse of Solitary Confinement in the U.S.

Indeed, over a century ago, the Supreme Court noted that: Prisoners subject to solitary confinement fell, after even a short confinement, into a semi-fatuous condition, from which it was next to impossible to arouse them, and others became violently insane; others still committed suicide; while those who withstood the ordeal better were not generally reformed, and in most cases did not recover sufficient mental activity to be of any subsequent service to the community. (re Medley, 134 U.S. 160, 168 (1890))

Other critics point to the enormous costs associated with solitary confinement. For example, supermax institutions typically cost two or three times more to build and operate than even traditional maximum security prisons. Despite the significant costs associated with solitary confinement, almost no research has been done on the outcomes produced by the increased use of solitary confinement or supermax prisons. In the research that has been conducted there is little empirical evidence to suggest that solitary confinement makes prisons safer. Indeed, emerging research suggests that supermax prisons actually have a negative impact on public safety.

Despite these concerns, states and the federal government continue to invest scarce taxpayer dollars in constructing supermax prisons and enforcing solitary confinement conditions. Yet there are stark new fiscal realities facing our communities today and for the foreseeable future. Both state and federal governments confront reduced revenue and mounting debt that are leading to severe cuts in essential public services like health and education. Given these harsh new realities, it is unquestionably time to ask whether we should continue to rely on solitary confinement and supermax prisons despite the high fiscal and human costs they impose.

The American Bar Association has created the following general definition of solitary confinement, which it calls "segregated housing": The term "segregated housing" means housing of a prisoner in conditions characterized by substantial isolation from other prisoners, whether pursuant to disciplinary, administrative, or classification action. "Segregated housing" includes restriction of a prisoner to the prisoner's assigned living quarters.

People in solitary confinement are also more likely to be subject to the use of