

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

excessive force and abuses of power. Correctional officers often misuse physical restraints, chemical agents, and stun guns, particularly when extracting people from their cells. The fact that the solitary confinement cells are isolated from the general population prisoners makes it more difficult to detect abuse.

Additionally, the idea that "the worst of the worst" are placed in solitary confinement makes it more likely that administrators will be apathetic or turn a blind eye to abuses. New York recently passed a law that excludes the seriously mentally ill from solitary confinement; requires periodic assessment and monitoring of the mental status of all prisoners subject to solitary confinement for disciplinary reasons; creates a non-disciplinary unit for prisoners with psychiatric disabilities where a therapeutic milieu is maintained and prisoners are subject to the least restrictive environment consistent with their needs and mental status; and requires that all staff be trained to deal with prisoners with mental health issues.

The United States uses solitary confinement to an extent unequalled in any other democratic country. But this has not always been so. The current overuse of solitary confinement is a relatively recent development that all too frequently reflects political concerns rather than legitimate public safety needs.

Based on over twenty years of empirical research, we now know that the human cost of increased physiological and psychological suffering caused by solitary confinement, coupled with the enormous monetary cost of its use, far outweighs any purported benefits. Now, in order to build a fair, effective and humane criminal justice system, we must work to limit its use overall and ensure that mentally ill persons are not subject to its deprivations.

Respectfully Submitted:

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mother of a son found guilty but mentally ill, and the following  
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Mothers of Incarcerated Sons Society, Inc. (M.I.S.S.)  
<http://www.mothersofinmates.org/>  
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