

Alternatives to Torture Save Lives: The Truth Behind the PROTECT Act

CT DOC claims that isolation and abusive chaining are necessary to keep staff and incarcerated people safe, but research on alternatives to solitary confinement demonstrates otherwise.

Does solitary confinement keep people inside prisons safe?

No. Not only is there zero evidence that solitary confinement decreases prison violence or works as a deterrent to future misbehavior,ⁱ but prolonged isolation is also harmful to people who live and work in prisons and jails.ⁱⁱ In fact, [research](#) suggests that a substantial reduction in violence stems from a *decrease* in the use of isolated confinement.ⁱⁱⁱ

What options exist other than isolation and restraints to address violence in prison?

Correctional systems around the country are realizing that prosocial activity, treatment, and other alternative approaches are both more humane and more effective than isolation, in-cell restraints, and other forms of punishment at ensuring safety among incarcerated people and correctional staff.

Colorado: Clinical Alternatives to Punitive Segregation Units provide **in-patient levels of mental health care and therapeutic and group programming** for people with serious mental illness who commit serious disciplinary infractions.

North Dakota: To focus on “long-term results” and reduce solitary confinement as safely and quickly as possible, North Dakota’s DOC director began modeling state prisons after those in Norway, which has a recidivism rate 3x lower than the U.S. and no life sentences or solitary confinement. Like in Norway, reformed prisons in North Dakota **imitate life on the outside** as much as possible to facilitate successful rehabilitation and reentry into society. Incarcerated people are known as “residents,” take art and social studies classes, play baseball and volleyball, and cook for each other. Even in the solitary confinement tier of the state’s maximum-security prison – which has decreased in population from 100 to 6 since 2015 – correctional officers and residents play games of cornhole together.

New York: New York City's Program to Accelerate Clinical Effectiveness (PACE) provides **mental health supports to support individuals before they commit serious infractions**. PACE uses incentives to reward positive behavior, and staff are trained on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and working with special populations, such as individuals with serious mental illness.

Maine: Intensive Mental Health Units have led to **reduced frequency of self-injurious behavior and violence** towards others.

Massachusetts: Behavior Management Units employ multidisciplinary treatment teams to address each individual’s health needs, and patients have at least 15 hours of structured out-of-cell programming and at least 10 hours of unstructured out-of-cell activity per week. The Units contributed to **significant reductions in the number of assaults on staff, the number of assaults on other incarcerated people, the number of days on suicide precautions, and the number of days spent in in-patient psychiatric settings.**

Ohio: At the Marion Correctional Institute in Ohio, the Opening Doors program focuses on **developing effective conflict resolution skills** through a combination of group and individual skills building activities. Resolution is a peer mediation program for interpersonal disputes, wherein individuals are provided space to explore their own solutions.

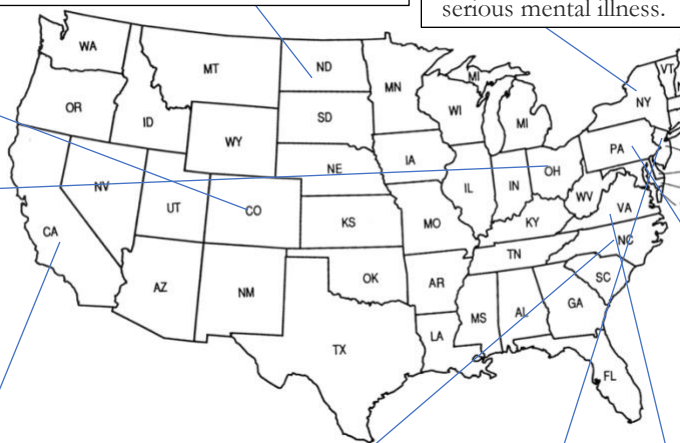
California: In San Francisco, the Resolve to Stop Violence Project (RSVP) uses an accountability program wherein individuals receive intensive programming **12 hours per day, 6 days per week that focuses on accountability, empathy, and awareness of one’s contribution to the community**, among other areas. The men who participated in the program were found to **have fewer violent incidents** than did men who did not participate, as well as lower levels of recidivism.

North Carolina: Rehabilitative Diversion Units include **substantial out-of-cell time, group sessions and pro-social programming**, and some other features that are similar to those in general population.

New Jersey: At the Middlesex County Adult Correction Center, specialized units are separate from the general population and offer specialized programming, but they include **the same out-of-cell time as general population, as well as congregative activity and some programming.**

Pennsylvania: In Philadelphia, a staff training program aims to build conflict management and problem-solving skills in order **improve staff responses to conflicts with individuals who are incarcerated.**

Virginia: Shared Allied Management Units are an alternative placement for individuals living with mental illness, who are medically infirm, and who are otherwise vulnerable. These units include access to in-unit and outside recreation, programming, and congregative group activities. Individuals placed in Virginia's Shared Allied Management Units experienced a **significant decrease in disciplinary offenses, placements in restrictive housing, and lengths of stay in restrictive housing.**



ⁱ Natasha A. Frost & Carlos E. Monteiro, *Administrative Segregation in U.S. Prisons Executive Summary*, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE, OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (March 2016), at 16, oip.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249750.pdf

ⁱⁱ Alison Shames, Jessa Wilcox, and Ram Subramanian, *Solitary Confinement: Common Misconception and Emerging Safer Alternatives*, VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE (May 2015), at 18 https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/solitary-confinement-common-misconceptions-and-emerging-safe-alternatives/legacy_downloads/solitary-confinement-misconceptions-safe-alternatives-report_1.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Role of SAM Units in Virginia's Restrictive Housing Reform, February 20, 2020, VA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/news-press-releases/2020/the-role-of-sam-units-in-virginia-s-restrictive-housing-reform/>; Joel Andrade, *Mental Health Units as Alternatives to Segregation*, VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE (June 22, 2017), <https://www.vera.org/blog/addressing-the-overuse-of-segregation-in-u-s-prisons-and-jails/mental-health-units-as-alternatives-to-segregation-it-can-be-done>; Bandy Lee & James Gilligan, "The Resolve to Stop the Violence Project: transforming an in-house culture of violence through a jail-based programme," 27 J. Pub. Health 149 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdi018>; James Gilligan & Bandy Lee, "The Resolve to Stop the Violence Project: reducing violence in the community through a jail-based initiative," 27 J. Pub. Health 143 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdi011>; David Kidd, Tender Justice: North Dakota is conducting a prison experiment unlike anything else in the United States, GOVERNING (Aug. 2018), <https://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-north-dakota-prison-criminal-justice-reform.html>.