



PROTECT Act Frequently Asked Questions

What is solitary confinement?

The Mandela rules define solitary confinement as “the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact.” Prolonged solitary confinement for more than 15 days is regarded as a form of torture.

How does the bill end prolonged isolation?

The PROTECT Act mandates at least 8 hours out of cell each day. In doing so, we ensure that no person can languish behind bars for days, months, and sometimes years on end. Even if an individual has to be separated from general population, they could no longer be indefinitely isolated. The PROTECT act also safeguards social bonds by guaranteeing access to a minimum number of letters and social visits. The bill would prohibit the punitive removal of phone calls, mail, and social visits.

How many people are isolated in the Department of Correction?

This is a simple question, but the Connecticut Department of Correction’s lack of transparency around isolation means the answer is actually hidden from the public. By separately tracking multiple restrictive statuses, providing insufficient data, and failing to document time-in-cell for people in general population, the Department of Correction obscures the reality of isolated confinement in Connecticut. On any given day, hundreds of people in the D.O.C. are on a formal restrictive status, but, according to the testimonies of incarcerated and formally incarcerated people, thousands may well be subjected isolated confinement.

Why mandate at least 8 hours out of cell?

Why not mandate more? A pro-social environment should, at minimum, include the option for someone to be out of cell for at least 8 hours. Gaurenteeing at least 8 hours out of cell is informed by the “principle of normalization,” wherein conditions in prisons replicate the outside world as best as possible. This minimum guarantee prepares an individual to return home from prison and effectively ends the use of isolated confinement.

What populations does the bill focus on?

While some groups of people are more susceptible to long-term damage from prolonged isolation, no human being should be intentionally subjected to torture. Solitary confinement and prolonged isolation must be banned across the board. However, for vulnerable populations likely to be irrevocably harmed from short-term isolation, we add additional protections so that, even under emergency circumstances, vulnerable populations are guaranteed adequate time out of cell and pro-social engagement.

What are your proposed alternatives to solitary confinement?

There are many alternatives to prolonged isolation. Our bill leaves the question of alternatives up to a coordinated effort between the office of the Correction Ombuds and the Department of Correction. To name just a few alternatives: the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Middlesex County Adult Correction Center, and Virginia Department of Corrections use specialized rehabilitation units for problematic individuals that are substantially less isolating; Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Washington State, and Maine have created diversionary units to avoid segregation; The Colorado Department of Corrections, New York City Department of Correction, and Nebraska Department of Correctional Services place explicit limits on length of isolation. These examples are just the tip of the iceberg.

Does the PROTECT Act support people who work in prisons and jails?

Yes. Solitary confinement is not a necessary tool for safety and security in correctional institutions. In fact, prolonged isolation is harmful to people who live and work in prisons and jails. Research suggests that a substantial reduction in violence stems from a decrease in the use of isolated confinement. In addition to the positive effects of reducing isolation, the PROTECT Act comprehensively recognizes the trauma that stems from working in a correctional environment. The bill extends workers compensation for certain mental or emotional impairment to include correctional officers. The bill also includes a provision to train staff on the “recognition and mitigation of trauma.”

Won't the PROTECT Act cost the State money?

No. We project savings of approximately \$14 million each year. For a detailed fiscal impact analysis, refer to our report *Protecting Lives, Saving Dollars*.