

REDUCE SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Campaigning for the Confined

I am calling members of my community to campaign for the reduction of prisoners held in solitary confinement for long terms. Many members of my community are unaware of the vast consequences associated with complete isolation of human beings. Let me provide some information to the readers in order for them to get a clear understanding how counter-productive solitary confinement really is.

In an article examining solitary confinement as psychological punishment, authors Benjamin and Lux emphasized that “[t]he evidence appears overwhelming that solitary confinement alone, even in the absence of physical brutality or unhygienic conditions, can produce emotional damage, declines in mental functioning and even the most extreme forms of psychopathology such as depersonalization, hallucination and delusions.”¹ Moreover, the emotional deterioration caused by solitary confinement does not seem to serve any significant penological purpose.² According to the same authors, the use of solitary confinement does not deter crime.³ “In fact, evidence indicates that the *slow torture of psychological breakdown* in solitary can produce such resentment and rage that the prison confined for *long* periods commits not only more *numerous* but also more *severe* breaches of discipline.”⁴

Furthermore, the psychological symptoms caused by isolation are antithetical to rehabilitation.⁵ Dr. Kaufman made a great point when saying the above statement. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections promotes, “It is the goal of the [Bureau] Department to [operate its institutions and programs so as to provide protection to the community, a safe and humane environment and opportunities for rehabilitation for the inmates], protect the public by confining persons committed to the Department’s custody in safe,, secure facilities and to provide opportunities for inmates to acquire the skills and values necessary to become productive law-abiding citizens, while respecting the rights of crime victims.”⁶

The restrictive housing unit (solitary confinement) offers no opportunities for inmates to acquire the skills and values necessary to become productive law-abiding citizens nor opportunities for rehabilitation. Solitary confinement keeps the inmates from bettering themselves.

With the above being mentioned to the readers, there is a need for a massive reduction in the use of solitary confinement for long periods. Prisons are now in modern times being used to “rehabilitate” a person in custody. Housing prisoners for long periods of time without opportunities to receive rehabilitation goes against what the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections promotes to the public.

Any member of my community who believes that there is a need for solitary confinement to be reduced based on the information provided above, please send your letter campaigning against the use of solitary to:

Mr. John Wetzel, Secretary
Department of Corrections
1920 Technology Parkway
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

It is recommended that any person campaigning against solitary confinement provide the Department of Corrections with alternatives that can be used in place of solitary confinement that satisfy the Department's mission statement. All ideas could potentially assist in fixing a major problem in the prison system.

Respectfully,

Christopher Balmer

©2012

^{FN1} Benjamin & Lux, *supra*, Note 163 at 268.

^{FN2} Luise, *supra*, Note 119 at 319-20 (citing *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337 (1981)).

^{FN3} Benjamin & Lux, *supra*, Note 163 at 288. The authors explained that roughly four of five prisoners that are in solitary confinement have been confined there in the past. *Id.*

^{FN4} *Id.* At 288 (citing *Spain v. Procunier*, 408 F. Supp. 534, 544-45 (N.D. Cal. 1976); *Pugh v. Locke*, 406 F. Supp. 318, 326 (M.D. Ala. 1976) (emphasis in original)).

^{FN5} Edward Kaufman, M.D., *The violation of psychiatric standards of care in prisons*, 137 *Am. J. Psychiatry*, 566, 569 (1980).

^{FN6} Title 37 Law Part III. Agencies and offices subpart D. Department of Corrections, Chapter 91. Administration Sec. 91.2 - Agency Purpose.

Christopher Balmer is currently incarcerated at SCI-Greene and has been locked in solitary confinement for almost 6 years. Christopher is a prisoner rights advocate, against the death penalty, the use of solitary confinement for long term, against abortion. He is a 24-year-old young man who enjoys reaching out to his community, educating them about the realities of living in prison.