

My name is Rahisha Bivens, I am a resident of New Haven. I am a licensed clinical social worker, Justice Advocate and Board Member of Stop Solitary CT. I'm here today to ask you to fund an independent oversight body over the Department of Corrections under the Office of Government Accountability, as the PROTECT Act currently before the Judiciary Committee would do.

I got involved in advocating for the rights of the incarcerated and in particular the end of solitary confinement in CT while supporting my brother Joshua who has schizophrenia and was incarcerated for 3 years in pre-trial Detention, languishing in his cell for 21 hours a day.

I know through personal experience that extreme isolation damages people's opportunity to heal & fully rehabilitate and is costly fiscally to the State of CT, and the lives of many people.

1000's of people, many who have serious mental illness, have experienced extreme isolation and are in their cell 20 hours or more a day in the general population in the State of CT.

My brother Joshua who has schizophrenia was confined to his cell the size of a bathroom for 21 hours a day in the general population in one of two prisons in the state for people with serious mental illness.

During Joshua's incarceration and at the age of 29 he became two times the size (obese) he was when he went in, and he became an insulin dependent diabetic and Vitamin D deficient because of the brutal nature & conditions of his confinement.

The ancillary costs of extreme isolation are astronomical. Our state is paying 2 times as much to care for those incarcerated with mental illness

Instead of getting much needed care and treatment for his mental illness, my brother's symptoms of schizophrenia became worse in conditions of extreme isolation and he deteriorated physically and mentally.

Thousands of people incarcerated in CT, are subjected to these inhumane conditions which cause them to deteriorate.

Each year more than 2 million people with serious mental illness are booked into jail. 1 & 4 people incarcerated in CT have mental illness, and it is widely known that putting people in solitary and extreme isolation can cause irreparable psychological damage in one week. Without independent oversight, there is little recourse for an incarcerated person.

On average it costs 53,112 to incarcerate someone in the general population. It is conservatively estimated that it costs 2x this amounts to incarcerate someone in solitary confinement annually (SSCT Fiscal Analysis).

The Protect Act would save the lives of 1000's of people.

Relegating people to state sanctioned torture & purgatory is unethical, a waste of taxpayer dollars, and inhumane. It is widely known that Solitary confinement doesn't anything to prevent or deter violence.

The current system does not have a way for people like my brother to be able to report treatment like this and that must end.

Today after advocating for my brother to sent to a hospital, my brother Joshua no longer needs insulin, has lost weight, has no mental health symptoms and started to heal from the physical conditions caused in prison.

My experience with my brother has shown me the need for independent oversight over the Department of Corrections, so that incarcerated people are truly protected.