

## Voices

"Life in the box is about an austere sameness that makes it difficult to tell one day from a thousand others. Nothing much and nothing new ever happens...But there is always the misery. If you manage to escape it yourself for a time, there will ever be plenty around in others for you to sense; and though you'll be unable to look into their eyes and see it, you might hear it in the nighttime when tough guys cry not-so-tough tears that are forced out of them by the unrelenting stress and strain that life in SHU is an exercise in."

—W, *held in isolated confinement in a maximum security men's prison in New York*

"In the box I am so tired...I feel like death... After a while I start talking to ants, crickets or any other living thing or imaginary thing I can think of so I do not totally lose what is left of my mind... I want to open people's eyes to the greater damage that happens to everyone by throwing the very young, mentally and emotionally ill into cages to rot under the pretense that more punishment, isolation, and deprivation will make people change for the better."

—S, *held in isolated confinement in a medium security women's prison in New York*

## Contact

For more information on the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement, visit our website at: [www.nycaic.org](http://www.nycaic.org).

To join CAIC's listserv, send an email to: [ny\\_caic-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:ny_caic-subscribe@lists.riseup.net).

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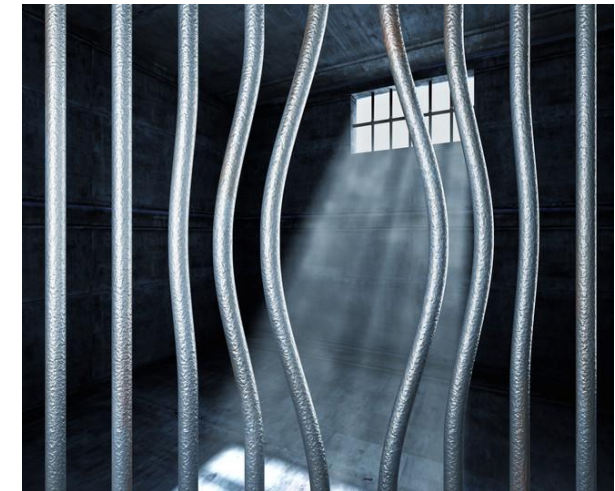
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Information in this brochure is drawn from the Correctional Association of New York ([www.correctionalassociation.org](http://www.correctionalassociation.org)); the New York Civil Liberties Union's report *Boxed In: The True Cost of Extreme Isolation in New York's Prisons* ([www.boxedinny.org](http://www.boxedinny.org)); the New York City Jails Action Coalition ([www.nycjac.org](http://www.nycjac.org)); and Solitary Watch ([www.solitarywatch.com](http://www.solitarywatch.com)). Cover image © tiero / [www.fotosearch.com](http://www.fotosearch.com).

# Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement

in New York's  
Prisons and Jails



"Think Outside  
the Box"

## Facts

- On any given day, as many as 4,500 men, women, and children are in isolated confinement in New York State prisons.
- In New York City's jails, at least 1,000 more are in solitary confinement.
- Individuals in isolated confinement spend 22 to 24 hours a day locked in their cells, alone or with one other person. They may be permitted one hour to exercise in a cage.
- The sensory deprivation, lack of normal human interaction, and extreme idleness can lead to intense suffering and severe psychological damage.
- Children or people with mental illness fare even worse in "the box"—yet they are disproportionately likely to end up there.
- People of color are also disproportionately represented in isolated confinement, even more than they are in New York's overall prison population.
- Every year, the state prison system sentences 13,000 people to terms in the "Special Housing Unit," or SHU.
- New York Law places no limit on the amount of time a person may be held in isolated confinement. SHU sentences can last anywhere from a few weeks to several years.
- Five out of six SHU sentences are for nonviolent misbehavior, rather than violent acts.
- States that have reduced their use of isolated confinement have seen *decreases* in prison violence.

## About CAIC

The goal of the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) is sweeping reform of New York's use of solitary confinement and other forms of extreme isolation in state prisons and local jails.

People in isolated confinement are restricted to their cells for 22 to 24 hours a day without meaningful human contact, programming, or therapy. This practice is ineffective, counterproductive, unsafe, and inhumane. It causes people detained in these conditions to deteriorate psychologically, physically, and socially. Despite these facts, New York utilizes isolated confinement at rates that are well above the national average.

CAIC brings together advocates, formerly incarcerated persons, family members of currently incarcerated people, concerned community members, lawyers, and individuals in the human rights, health, and faith communities throughout New York State. We invite individuals and organizations to join the campaign's ongoing efforts.

## Principles

- I. New York must adopt clear and objective criteria to ensure the limited and legitimate uses of separation, such as a last-resort response to a designated level of imminent violence or threats to safety and security.
- II. New York must dramatically reduce the length of time anyone spends separated.
- III. New York must automatically exclude certain vulnerable people from isolated confinement, including young people and people with significant physical, mental, and cognitive disabilities.
- IV. New York must fundamentally transform the nature of any separation of incarcerated persons, provide intensive therapeutic responses to problematic behavior, treat all incarcerated persons with humanity and dignity, offer meaningful human interaction for those separated, and make available individualized treatment and meaningful programming when people are separated.
- V. New York must provide all incarcerated persons with an effective mechanism for obtaining transfer from separation to the general prison population and provide meaningful support to help people transition back into the general population and our communities.
- VI. New York must enhance transparency, fairness, and accountability in the operation of any form of separation and in the procedures that result in people being separated.