

CAMPAIGN FOR ALTERNATIVES TO ISOLATED CONFINEMENT

The goal of the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement 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, counter-productive, 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 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 CAOC's ongoing efforts.

To join, subscribe to our listserv by emailing ny_caic-subscribe@lists.riseup.net. For more information, go to www.nycaic.com.

The Facts About Isolated Confinement in New York State Prisons

- **Isolated confinement** punishes individuals through the absolute deprivation of meaningful human interaction and mental stimulation.
- Individuals in isolated confinement receive their meals through a slot in their cell door. They may recreate for one hour a day in a small cage no larger than their cell. They receive no educational, vocational or rehabilitative programming, and no transitional services to help them prepare for their return to society.
- Each day as many as 4,500 people—hundreds of whom are children under 21—are held in “Special Housing Units,” or SHUs. This is nearly 8% of all people in prison. More than 13,000 SHU sentences are imposed every year.
- Every day, roughly 2,250 men in New York's prisons live in extreme isolation with another person. Double-celled individuals experience the same isolation and idleness, withdrawal, anxiety, anger and depression as do those living alone in the SHU. But they must also endure the constant presence of another man in their personal physical and mental space.
- Contrary to popular myth, isolation is not used primarily to address chronically violent behavior or serious safety or security concerns. It most often is used in response to non-violent prison rule violations, or even retaliation for questioning authority, talking back to staff, or filing grievances. Staff has wide discretion in imposing SHU sentences, resulting in a disproportionate number of African Americans in the SHU.
- Each year, DOCCS prosecutes approximately 150,000 alleged prison rule violations, and finds 95% guilty. SHU confinement is the punishment for some of those violations. The majority of SHU sentences are 90 days or more, and many people receive much longer sentences, stretching to years or decades. The United Nations' current standards limit isolated confinement to a maximum of 15 days.
- People in isolated confinement are not offered resources, such as substance abuse treatment, to break the habits that may have brought them to the SHU.
- Every year, roughly 2,000 people are released directly from the SHU back to the community, without needed transitional programming. It is well documented that time in solitary makes re-entry more difficult and increases recidivism.

Sources: *New York State Civil Liberties Union, “Boxed In”*: www.boxedinny.org/ and *Correctional Association of New York*: www.correctionalassociation.org/



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