

For Immediate Release...

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FIFTEEN RABBIS AND OTHER JEWISH COMMUNITY LEADERS IN NY SENATE MAJORITY LEADER STEWART-COUSINS' DISTRICT URGE VOTE ON H.A.L.T. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ACT

The Landmark Bill Passed the Assembly with an Overwhelming Majority in 2018

(Westchester, NY) – Today, a new group of 15 rabbis and other Jewish community leaders released an open letter (attached) to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins urging the New York State Senate to immediately bring the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act (S.1623-Sepúlveda/A.2500-Aubry) to the floor for a vote. The rabbis, cantors, Jewish communal leaders, and rabbinical students who co-signed the letter all live, work, or study in the Majority Leader's district and are affiliated with T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Right. HALT has 33 official co-sponsors in the State Senate, more than the number of votes needed to pass it, and the bill is on the floor calendar.

The letter reads, in part:

“Solitary confinement is both a moral and a religious issue. Genesis reminds us that no human being should be alone. G-d then creates a helpmate to end man's isolation. Classical rabbinic sources extol the virtue of repentance at the heart of rehabilitation. The false accusation that was the basis of our ancestor Joseph's imprisonment in the Torah weaves through it a long thread on the danger of shackling people whose freedom is taken at the expense of their dignity.”

The Jewish leaders further call on the Majority Leader to lift up the voices of people behind prison and jail walls, concluding: “You can be a light for what is human, restorative and good.”

One of the co-signers of the letter, **Rabbi Lester Bronstein**, added: “Our religious laws prohibit the torture of any person, whether it be physical or psychological torture. Solitary confinement drives a person in prison insane. Neither Jewish law nor any other religious system would brook such treatment, especially since it in no way serves the purpose of punishing criminals or keeping society safe from them. As religious Jews, we stand opposed to this form of cruel - but all too usual - punishment.”

BACKGROUND:

33 New York State Senators from Long Island to Upstate New York are officially co-sponsoring the HALT Solitary Confinement Act. Additional Senators have committed to vote for the bill, as well.

Thousands of people remain in solitary confinement in New York's prisons and jails each day, and tens of thousands each year experience this torture: 22 to 24 hours a day in a cell without any meaningful human contact or programs. They are disproportionately Black and Latinx people, young people, gender non-conforming people, and people with mental illness.

People continue to spend months, years, and decades in solitary (including [30+ years](#)) in NY. The sensory deprivation, lack of normal interaction, and extreme idleness of solitary can lead to intense suffering and severe psychological, physical, and even neurological damage. [More than 30% of all prison suicides](#) in New York take place in solitary.

The entire United Nations, including the US, passed rules prohibiting solitary beyond 15 days for any person, because it otherwise would amount to torture. **Colorado has implemented a 15-day limit** in its prisons and reduced the number of people in solitary from 1,500 to 18. **The HALT Solitary Confinement Act (S1623-Sepulveda/A2500-Aubry) similarly includes a 15-day limit** on solitary, and would create more humane and effective alternatives. A summary of the bill can be found [here](#). The bill passed the State Assembly for the first time in 2018 by a vote of 99 to 45.

States that have reduced the use of solitary have seen a positive impact on safety for both incarcerated people and staff. Community members are calling for New York State Legislators and Governor Cuomo to pass HALT immediately.

Learn more at www.nycaic.org.

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