

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As representatives of civil and human rights organizations, religious organizations, faith-based and community leaders, defense attorneys, and mental health professionals, we applaud your recent historic remarks recognizing that solitary confinement does nothing to rehabilitate those who are incarcerated. We also welcome your announcement that the U.S. Attorney General will conduct a national review of the practice in prisons and jails across the United States. We are writing to urge that this review result in recommendations that create a clear pathway toward the elimination of the use of long-term and indefinite isolation in the United States.

Following two Congressional hearings on solitary confinement, a highly critical report on the federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) use of solitary confinement by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in May 2013; and an independent audit of BOP's use of solitary confinement released in February 2015, it is abundantly clear that solitary confinement is overused and abused across the country. In fact, the audit of BOP's practices found that more than 10,000 people were subject to solitary confinement in federal prisons on any given day in 2013. In some of these units, terms of solitary confinement average nearly *four years*. In light of these findings, the expert auditors recommended that the agency take immediate steps, including:

- Stopping the practice of placing persons with serious mental illness in solitary;
- Stopping the practice of placing vulnerable prisoners in solitary "for their own protection";
- Stopping the practice of releasing prisoners directly back to the community from solitary confinement units without any re-entry services; and
- Limiting the mandatory amount of time prisoners are held in solitary confinement.

Despite the urgency of the audit's findings, to date, BOP has not made public any plans for implementation of its recommendations. It is imperative they do so without delay.

Nationwide, on any given day, more than 80,000 people, including children and persons with mental illness, are held in conditions of solitary confinement in state and federal prisons for months, years, even decades, with many more facing conditions of extreme isolation in jails, detention centers, and juvenile justice facilities throughout the United States. Thousands are released directly from solitary back into our communities profoundly damaged.

Neuroscience, ethics and international human rights law widely consider solitary confinement a form of torture. Indeed, decades of research demonstrate the harms of

solitary confinement on human beings. Its systematic and widespread use in our criminal justice system compromises our stated commitments to human rights, human dignity, the human potential for redemption, and public safety.

States and jurisdictions across the country are implementing policy changes that focus on alternatives to solitary confinement. Some have abolished the practice for persons under the age of 18, pregnant women, and for persons with mental illness. Several states are also considering legislative proposals that embrace the recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, which include prohibiting placement in solitary confinement beyond 15 consecutive days. Supporting and incentivizing such reforms across the country and in the BOP should be an explicit goal of the Attorney General's study of solitary confinement.

For the well-being of the men and women incarcerated in federal prisons, the communities to which they will return, and the staff employed by federal facilities, we urge you to ensure the implementation of the BOP auditors' recommendations without delay. We further urge you to ensure a national review that prioritizes humane alternatives to prolonged solitary confinement, including mental health treatment, rehabilitation, and a clear path to the elimination of long-term isolation. Such a review should be completed with enough time for your administration to be able implement its recommendations.

The torture of prolonged solitary confinement compromises public safety, increases recidivism, is immoral and indeed has no place in any civilized society. Now is the time to act to ensure it has no place in our own.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers in Action (AAMIA)
African American Ministers Leadership Council (AAMLC)
African Methodist Episcopal Minister's Coalition for Redemption and Justice
Alaska Innocence Project
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Friends Service Committee
American Humanist Association
Arizona Center for Disability Law
Arizona Innocence Project
Arizona Justice Project (Justice Project, Inc.)
The Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, UAW Local 2325
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Brookline PeaceWorks
Brooklyn Defender Services
California Families Against Solitary Confinement
California Innocence Project
California Prison Focus
Campaign for Youth Justice

Center for Public Representation
Center for Race, Religion, and Economic Democracy
The Chicago Committee to Defend the Bill of Rights
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
Children's Law Center, Inc., Covington, Kentucky
The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants – International (International CURE)
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants – Virginia Inc. (Virginia CURE)
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants –Nevada (NV-CURE)
Community Legal Aid Society, Inc
Connecticut Innocence Project
The Correctional Association of NY
Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church
Criminal Justice Policy Coalition
DeafCAN!, Deaf Community Action Network
Disability Rights Iowa
Disability Rights Maine
Disability Rights Washington
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
EMIT: End Mass Incarceration Together, working group of Unitarian Universalist Mass
Action
Family UNItY Network of Imprisoned People
Florida Council of Churches
Florida Institutional Legal Services Project
Florida Justice Institute
The Fortune Society
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Justice Institute
Hip Hop Caucus
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
I.S.P. Consulting
Illinois Coalition Against Torture
Illinois Innocence Project
Incarcerated Nation Corp.
Innocence & Justice Clinic, Wake Forest University School of Law
Innocence Project
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
JustLeadershipUSA
Legal Aid Justice Center, Charlottesville, Virginia
Life After Innocence
Maine Council of Churches
Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC)

Maryland Disability Law Center
Mass Incarceration Working Group, First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington
(MA)
Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice
Metropolitan Community Churches
Midwest Innocence Project
Montana Innocence Project
Muslim Justice League
NAACP Maine State Prison Branch
NAACP Portland Maine Branch
National Alliance on Mental Illness – Huntington (NAMI – Huntington)
National Alliance on Mental Illness – New York State (NAMI-NYS)
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI National)
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Churches
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement
New York City Jails Action Coalition
New York Law School Innocence Clinic
North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence
North Carolina Stop Torture Now
Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church
Ohio Innocence Project
Pax Christi Massachusetts
Pax Christi USA
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pennsylvania Innocence Project
Peoples' Action for Rights and Community (PARC)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)
Princeton's Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR)
Prison Activist Resource Center (PARC)
The Prison Law Office
Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York
Protection & Advocacy Project (Disability Rights North Dakota)
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities, Inc. (P&A, Columbia, SC)
Ramsay Merriam Fund
The Real Cost of Prisons Project
Resources for Organizing and Social Change (ROSC)
Sisters of St. Joseph Non-Violence Committee
Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood NY
Social Action Linking Together (SALT)
Social Workers Against Prolonged Solitary Confinement
Solitary Confinement. Org
Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Manhattanville
St. Susanna Peace and Justice Committee, Dedham MA
Sylvia Rivera Law Project
Tamms Year Ten
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
University of Miami Innocence Clinic
Uptown People's Law Center
Virginia Council of Churches
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
West Virginia Innocence Project
WISDOM of Wisconsin
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Boston Branch
Wrongful Conviction Clinic at IU McKinney
Wrongful Conviction Project, Office of the Ohio Public Defender

cc: U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch