



The Torture of Solitary Confinement in NY

- People in solitary in NY State spend all day **locked in a cell** the size of an elevator, alone or with one other person. They do not receive any meaningful programs or therapy.
- The sensory deprivation, lack of normal human interaction, and extreme idleness can lead to intense suffering and severe damage. Isolated confinement fails to address, and often exacerbates, underlying causes of difficult behavior as people deteriorate psychologically, physically, and socially. Roughly a third of all suicides take place in solitary in NY.
- Most people sent to isolation in New York State prisons spend **months or years** there; some individuals have been in solitary confinement in New York's prisons for **more than two decades (upwards of 30 years)**. The **entire United Nations General Assembly has denounced solitary exceeding 15 days**. NY currently places **no limit on the total time** a person can spend in isolated confinement.
- **Thousands of people are in solitary in NY prisons and jails each day, and tens of thousands each year**, at rates worse than the national average. The majority of sentences that result in solitary are for non-violent conduct. **Black people** represent about 18% of all people in NYS, but **48%** of those incarcerated in NYS, and **57% of people** held in solitary confinement units in NY. Young people, people with mental illness, and gender non-conforming people are disproportionately likely to be put in isolation.
- Many hundreds of people are **released directly from solitary to the outside community** each year in NY; receiving no educational or rehabilitative programming & no transitional services to help them prepare for their return to society, increasing rates of recidivism.
- Any correction officer can write a disciplinary ticket for alleged rule violations. Hearings by DOCCS employees to adjudicate disciplinary tickets that result in solitary confinement are arbitrary and unfair: 95% of people charged with these rule violations are found guilty.

HALT Solitary Confinement Act, S.1623 / A.2500

Currently with a majority 34 co-sponsors in the Senate and 79 co-sponsors in the Assembly, HALT would:

- End the torture of solitary: no person can ever be held in isolated confinement beyond 15 days in line with international standards, including the UN Mandela Rules.
- Create more humane & effective alternatives by fundamentally transforming the response to people's needs/behaviors, from deprivation/isolation to more support, programs, therapy. Anyone separated from general prison population beyond 15 days: at least seven hours per day out-of-cell with meaningful human contact & programs.
- Drastically restrict the criteria that can result in isolation or separation to the most egregious conduct in need of an intensive therapeutic and rehabilitative intervention.
- Ban solitary for people particularly vulnerable to the effects/abuse inside of, isolation.
- Better equip staff to work with incarcerated people (via training). Make the processes resulting in separation fairer (including via legal representation), more transparent (via mandatory reporting), and with more accountability (via outside oversight).

Widespread Support for HALT Solitary Confinement Act

- The NY Assembly passed HALT in 2018. There is currently a majority of both houses who are co-sponsors of HALT (34 in Senate; 79 in Assembly) - more than enough votes to pass
- Advocates are calling for the legislature to bring HALT to a vote immediately, and for Governor Cuomo to sign it.
- Across the City, State, and country, there is growing support to end solitary confinement, including from leading U.S. Presidential candidates, such as [Bernie Sanders](#) and [Elizabeth Warren](#). For example, Bernie Sanders has called for “ending solitary confinement,” stating that “solitary confinement is a form of torture and unconstitutional, plain and simple.”

NY has Increased Solitary & Governor Aims to Perpetuate It

- The Governor proposed regulations that will [perpetuate solitary](#) and its harm through: a) endless cycling after purported time limits (ie in solitary 90 days, out 1 day, in another 90 days); b) no time limits for keeplock in own cell - another form of solitary; c) purported alternatives that are solitary by another name; d) solitary of young people & people with mental health needs.
- A [new report by the New York Civil Liberties Union](#) (NYCLU) shows that DOCCS and the Governor want to maintain the status quo and continue to perpetuate solitary. New York prisons have increased the use of solitary confinement -- particularly the use of keeplock -- in recent years, despite a lawsuit settlement meant to limit the practice, with over 38,000 sentences to solitary confinement last year alone.
- The Governor has made blatantly [false claims about the costs](#) of implementing HALT. HALT will not require significant, if any, additional funds, and will save the state money.

NY Must Enact the HALT Solitary Confinement Act Now

- There need to be REAL time limits on solitary for all people and REAL alternatives to solitary that are not solitary by another name and instead actually will improve safety and be more humane. New York must end this torture.
- Programs like the former Merle Cooper Program in New York State, RSVP Program in San Francisco jails, and CAPS program in NYC are examples of what real alternatives should look like, with all day out of cell (at least 7 hours), meaningful *congregate* programming, and meaningful human engagement.
- Far too many minds and lives have been taken or destroyed, including [Kalief Browder](#), [Benjamin van Zandt](#), [Layleen Polanco](#), and countless others. NY can wait no longer.
- Beyond passing HALT, New York must move to dismantle the entire injustice and incarceration system, with some priorities this year including: Elder Parole & Fair & Timely Parole, voting rights for people in prison & on parole, higher education in prison, stop staff brutality, marijuana justice, visiting. Also, NYC must [completely end](#) solitary.