

My name is Alexa Adams, and I am a social work intern with the Urban Justice Center's Mental Health Project (MHP) and a student at New York University obtaining my Masters in Social Work. Thank you for allowing for comments on such an important issue. Through my work with MHP, I have come to learn more about the detrimental effects solitary confinement has on a person. In plain words, solitary confinement is torture. The United Nations (UN) defines solitary confinement as it is now in the U.S., as, "cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment, and, in certain instances, may amount to torture" (United Nations General Assembly, 2008). The UN calls for a complete ban of a solitary sanction longer than 15 days. Solitary as it is now is a violation of human rights law. The New York City Board of Corrections has an obligation and duty to ensure all individuals who are incarcerated in NYC jails have their rights and dignity upheld and to "support safer, fairer, smaller, and more humane NYC jails" (NYC Board of Corrections). I am very concerned about this State sanctioned violence and torture and urge the Board to implement NYC Jails Action Coalition and #HALTsolitary's Blueprint to End Solitary Confinement.

Solitary has serious detriments to the health, mental health, overall wellbeing and the psyche of an individual. Those detained in solitary confinement spend 22-24 hours a day locked up in a cell no bigger than 6-by-8 feet. Most of these individuals do not receive adequate programming, treatment, or recreation time. As a social worker committed to assisting those with mental health concerns, I can tell you just how damaging this is to one's mental health, overall wellbeing, and the trauma it creates. The isolation completely changes the brain. Those held are more susceptible to suicide, self-harm, and other lasting health and mental health conditions. The effects continue well after an individual is released from solitary or jail and interfere with one's psychosocial environment, making community integration much harder and often times starting a

vicious cycle of violence and re-incarceration. I have seen this occur time and time again through the voices of those affected, the data and research, and the expertise of those working on this issue.

NYC Jails Action Coalition and #HALTsolitary's Blueprint to End Solitary Confinement outlines how the City can end solitary confinement and create conditions for those incarcerated centered on restorative justice, violence prevention, and community re-entry. The Blueprint was created by survivors and those directly impacted, their loved ones, and individuals who work in the field. The basic tenets include:

1. Ensure that the Board of Correction minimum standards for out-of-cell time apply to all people in city jails (other than in specified emergencies), by removing exceptions to those standards for punitive segregation and Enhanced Supervision Housing (ESH) units; 2. Create minimum standards for emergency individual lock-ins and emergency lockdowns; 3. End punitive segregation and make ESH and any other alternative units actually about safety, rehabilitation, and prevention of violence; 4. Adopt specific mechanisms and time limits for getting out of ESH and any other alternatives units; and 5. Dramatically limit use of restraints with a strong presumption against their use. (NYC Jails Action Coalition and #HALTsolitary, 2019)

We have an ethical duty to ensure that all New Yorkers' basic rights are upheld and the current use of solitary is completely unethical as it stands. As a social worker, I also have a specific Code of Ethics I must follow in my practice. Solitary is completely against my professional and personal values and I am not OK with those I serve to continue to be harmed.

By implementing the Blueprint, we can create a world where ending torture is possible – where we focus on violence prevention, restorative justice, meaningful programming, and community re-integration. We must listen to the voices of survivors of this injustice and their loved ones. The Blueprint centers these voices and needs, giving us a plan to un-build this State sanctioned violence. How many lives must we lose before actual, concrete change occurs? Thank you for your work and taking the time to listen to those impacted and advocates on this matter.