



**MEMO OF SUPPORT FOR THE HALT SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ACT
S.2836/A.2277A**

The Children's Defense Fund-New York (CDF) submits this memo of support for the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, S.2836/A.2277A. We have consistently advocated for the end of punitive isolation for adolescents, young adults and people of all ages. We urge the legislature to pass this legislation immediately.

CDF is a non-profit child advocacy organization that works statewide to ensure that *every* child in New York State has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and a successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. As the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund, a national organization which grew out of the Civil Rights Movement, we are committed to advancing racial equity and to leveling the playing field for vulnerable New York children, youth and families. CDF strives to improve conditions for young people through research, public education, policy development, organizing and advocacy. Our policy priority areas are racial justice, health justice, education justice, economic justice, child welfare and youth justice.

We are proud to have successfully advocated for prohibitions against solitary confinement for youth under 18 statewide – and for youth 21 and younger in NYC, and we urge New York to end solitary confinement for *people of all ages* by investing in alternative therapeutic responses that keep those who are in custody – and those who work there -- safe.

The **Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act** would restrict the use of segregated confinement and creates alternative therapeutic and rehabilitative confinement options; limit the length of time a person may be in segregated confinement, and excludes certain persons from being placed in segregated confinement.

HALT is needed now to stop the harm of solitary confinement. It would end the torture of prolonged solitary confinement for all people in New York prisons and jails, and create more humane and effective alternatives. We join survivors of solitary confinement and families who have lost loved ones in solitary, along with leading civil and human rights groups, mental health advocates, faith leaders, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and over 300 other organizations across New York State who support HALT. We applaud the majorities of legislators in both the Senate and the Assembly who officially co-sponsor this bill and call for urgent action to enact it.

Reasons for the Urgency of Passing the HALT Solitary Confinement Act

Every year, tens of thousands of New Yorkers are locked in solitary confinement for months, years, and even decades. More than 8-in-10 people in solitary in New York State prisons are Black and/or Latinx. This is a crucial racial justice issue. The HALT bill, which would end the torture of long-term solitary confinement and replace it with more effective rehabilitative alternatives, has the support of a majority of legislators and now is the time to pass it.

Research shows that solitary confinement causes immense suffering and devastating physical and mental harm, and often leads to psychosis, heart disease, self-mutilation, and death. Last year, the #HALTsolitary campaign released a report documenting a surge in suicide and self-harm in New York State prisons, driven by solitary confinement. Every other day in 2019, on average, a person in New York State prison attempted suicide, and at least one-third of all suicides took place in solitary confinement. Despite the known harms of even the shortest periods of time in solitary, New York State prisons and local jails regularly hold people—disproportionately Black people and other People of Color—in such conditions for extended periods, even for more minor infractions.

During the current pandemic, the harm and spread of the virus has been exacerbated by the failure to release vulnerable people from prison and by the state's medically inappropriate and dangerous use of solitary confinement in lieu of medical care and quarantine in contravention of health experts' recommendations. Solitary confinement weakens people's immune systems, requires close physical contact with staff, and discourages people from reporting symptoms.

Importantly, solitary confinement fails to address safety within prisons and jails because extreme isolation ignores the root causes of problematic behaviors. Instead, solitary confinement breeds trauma, despair, and serious mental illness. We are keenly aware of this in the context of adolescents and emerging adults (youth 18-25), where research has established that solitary confinement is ineffective at reducing behavioral incidents and may actually lead to an increase of violent behavior. Due to ongoing brain development, adolescents and young adults are more vulnerable than older adults to the harmful effects of solitary confinement, such as increased risk for mental illness or worsened mental illness, anxiety, rage, insomnia, self-mutilation; suicidal thoughts/ideation, and suicide. Jurisdictions that have restricted solitary while introducing targeted programming have seen gains in safety.

Now is the time to act. In the names of Layleen Polanco, Kalief Browder, Ben Van Zandt, Dante Taylor and so many others who have died, we respectfully urge the legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, the HALT Solitary Confinement Act.

For more information about this bill, please contact Julia L. Davis, Director of Youth Justice & Child Welfare at jdavis@childrensdefense.org.