



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB539**  
**Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing – Limitations**

Date: February 9, 2018

From: Moya Atkinson, MSW, former Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter; Co-Founder, Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement (SWASC)

To: Senator Bobby Zirkin, Chair, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Re: SUPPORT FOR BILL SB539

Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement, a chapter of Social Welfare Action Alliance, welcomes this opportunity to testify. Our mission is to replace solitary confinement with humane alternatives.

Social workers and other health professionals find themselves aware of—or even witness to—abusive practices that challenge their obligations to their profession’s ethical code to challenge social problems and injustice, and to respect the dignity and worth of every individual.

Such abuses are described in “Beyond Incarceration: Lock Down for Persons with Disabilities, an Investigation by Disability Rights, Maryland, 2017”. The following findings are summarized, with examples: “Individuals with mental illness in segregation drank from their toilets, smeared feces, banged their heads, cut themselves, heard voices, attempted suicide, were subjected to use of force, and do not get access to programs....

“Maryland uses segregation excessively, Individuals with mental illness are disproportionately placed in segregation. DPSCS under-identifies disability. Individuals with disabilities are subject to discrimination. Insufficient mental health and correctional staffing and programming contribute to reliance on segregation.

“DPSCS returned over \$30 million of its budget because of vacancies last fiscal year and has significant staffing shortage. NBCI psychology department positions mostly vacant. NBCI has no recreation therapists or substance abuse counselors.”

The passage of SB 539 will provide standards which allow those in the prison system to have the means to reform the existing wasteful, destructive, broken system. The recommended changes in the law provide a path to treatment, rehabilitation and a future.

We value the work of Interfaith Action for Human Rights, the Maryland Prisoners’ Rights Coalition and all the organizations and individuals who worked to bring this bill to your attention.

Respectfully submitted,

Moya Atkinson

