

Letter sent to New York State elected officials regarding solitary confinement and the passage of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act

Approved Spring Sessions 2015

Dear [name of elected official]:

The New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) calls on Governor Cuomo to support the reform of the practice of solitary confinement in the state correctional facilities and local jails of New York, as developed in the Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, Bill #A4401/S2659. With the enactment of the changes in the use of solitary confinement proposed in the Act, New York would become a leader in the effort to stop human rights abuses in the United States.

Quakers believe that there is that of God present in every person, that every person is entitled to humane treatment and that no person is beyond redemption. We heed the teaching of Jesus: “Lord, when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the King will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25: 39-40)

Our present experience informs us. In New York State we help provide Alternatives to Violence programs in 15 correctional facilities and we hold worship groups in eight facilities. We have firsthand experience with those who are imprisoned. We know that positive interactions and programming support constructive change.

The way we treat people affects their ability to connect with that of God within. The use of solitary confinement has nothing to do with the original crime and creates permanent psychological and physical injury. Incarcerated men, women and youth are then less able to make positive changes. They become more of a risk to themselves, to Corrections Officers, and when released, to the public. Research on the effects of solitary confinement confirms this.

We have come to understand as Friends that violence may also be psychological and emotional, not just physical. We believe that solitary confinement is immoral, inhumane, a violation of religious principles, and a sin against the healing and redemptive work of God. Solitary confinement as it is currently employed in New York State is a form of torture and must be stopped.

We ask that you support passage of the Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, Bill #A4401/S2659.