

Rossana Natalini
STANDISH
LD 696

Senator Deschambault, Rep Warren and honorable members of the criminal justice and public safety committee. My names is Rossana Natalini. I am here today to speak in support of LD 696 An Act To Prohibit Solitary Confinement in Maine's Corrections System.

No human being should suffer inhumane treatment while in prison or jail. It is time to ban solitary confinement in Maine.

In 2017, my son, Dante Marjeroni, was incarcerated in Cumberland County Jail in maximum security isolation. A 2021 study found that people suffering from mental illness are 170% more likely to spend extended periods of time in solitary confinement. According to another article, the rate of self-harm among those in solitary is 10 times that of the general prison population. For those suffering from PTSD, it can increase depression and lead to thoughts of suicide.

Because of Dante's PTSD and mental health conditions, I pleaded with the police and the court appointed attorney telling them that Dante needed to be in the hospital, not jail.

Ignoring my pleas, they placed him in isolation in the maximum security unit.

March 21, 2017 was the last time I saw my son alive. Dante wrote on the walls of his cell, "I am going to kill myself. I am going to die here." He attempted suicide. One week later, still in isolation, he committed suicide.

I received a knock at my door at 2:00 am in the morning and was told by the police that my son was in critical condition in the hospital on life support.

Since his death four years ago, my family and I have endured much pain and suffering It could easily have been prevented.

Dante was a good kid, well liked, loved by his family, an athlete and a community volunteer. He would take the shirt off his back to help others. We miss him.

Isolation is not the solution. It is inhumane.

Instead, we need more community mental health services and training for corrections officers so they can recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis.

It is time that Maine did away with solitary confinement. Research shows that it harms. It does not have any rehabilitative purpose. It makes our communities less safe. Most people in prison or in jail will be released back into the community. If we want them to be successful, we must consider the consequences of our treatment of them while they are in our care.

Please give unanimous support to LD 696.

And, if you see someone who is sad or a little off, reach out to them. We all need loving support when we are struggling.

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Solitary Confinement Condemns Many Prisoners to Long-Term Health Issues By Katja Ridderbusch OCTOBER 5, 2021 Kaiser Health News. Reviews the research and literature on the health effects of solitary confinement. <https://khn.org/news/article/solitary-confinement-effects-on-prisoner-mental-health/>

Sonja E. Siennick, Mayra Picon, Jennifer M. Brown & Daniel P. Mears (2021) Revisiting and Unpacking the Mental Illness and Solitary Confinement Relationship, Justice Quarterly, DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2020.1871501

Having a mental illness was associated with an increase of up to 170% in the odds of extended solitary confinement, depending on the diagnosis. A wide range of mental illnesses predicted extended solitary confinement. The association between having a mental illness and being sent to extended solitary confinement was only partially explained by misconduct. The findings suggest that incarcerated persons with mental illness may garner differential responses from the prison system, similar to those seen in studies of arrest and incarceration.