

**Antoine Coleman**

## Testimony of Antoine Coleman

Before the D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

Budget oversight hearing for the Department of Corrections

April 10, 2024

Hello Chairwoman Pinto, and other members in attendance. Thank you for this opportunity to share my testimony. My name is Antoine Coleman. I am an advocate for Free Minds Book Club and Thrive Under 25 as well as for the Unlock The Box DC Coalition's struggle to end solitary confinement.

During my 22 years of incarceration in the BOP, no less than 7 years of that time was spent in a Segregated Housing Unit bka the 'Hole'. It is undoubtedly a conscious battle against insanity the second you're locked in that tiny cell by yourself. Not everyone is able to adjust to such dire circumstances, especially those who go into the cell already battling with mental health issues. Nevermind there is no reprieve provided for this agony. It is designed for the sole purpose of punishment and there's evidence to show the overall effect lasts far longer than it should. For example, I know guys personally who were subjected to the Hole and came out of these situations having lost their ability to be around others in a healthy way. Their trust for people is destroyed by it. Again, research shows that solitary confinement doesn't even make a prison or jail safer at all.

Most crime is rooted in mental capacity. The goal should

always be to help people deal, then hopefully heal their mental health, not make it worse. The reality is, over 95% of people in prison will go home back to their community, who then will have to deal with an even more aggravated individual.

So they go in bad, come out worst, inevitably going back in, and so the cycle continuesâ€¦!!! treatment in prison only makes it harder for you to acclimate back into society once you are released.

People who are already dealing with mental health issues, the last thing they need is to be locked alone in a cell. Even with a cellmateâ€“ 23 hours inside of a disturbingly small room will undoubtedly cause lasting negative effects? Extensive research shows how solitary confinement leads to psychosis, neurological damage, severe anxiety, panic, paranoia, despair, depression, memory and concentration loss, and drug use. Research also shows that placing people in solitary confinement makes it more likely that they will die in the first year after release, especially from suicide and opioid overdose.

The “Hole” not only facilitates mental decline, but a physical decline, and a spiritual decline.

Your hair gets disheveled. You are served less food and will likely lose weight. Adequate hygiene is nearly impossible. You don't get a chance to congregate to have spiritual fellowship, something many may need. The issue of 'safety' is often mentioned in justifying these conditions. But absolute deprivation of humanity should be more of a safety issue than any institution infraction.

If the overall goal is to lessen crime and make society safer, you have to start with something that is proven that it doesn't make

society safer: solitary confinement and the conditions of confinement. For these reasons, I ask you to hold a hearing on the ERASE Solitary Confinement Act, introduced last year. Please hold this hearing as soon as possible, ideally before the Council recess.

To subject someone to months and years of isolation, when we know that person most likely is returning to the community, that is not public safety. What DOC calls fixing the problem is only making the problem worse.

Thank you.