

[Testimony of Damon Donelson-Bey](#)

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

Performance oversight hearing for the DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

February 7, 2024

Hello Councilperson Pinto, and other members in attendance.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues for having me. My name is Damon Donelson-Bey. I am an Advocate for the UTB (Unlock The Box) Coalition's struggle to end Solitary Confinement within the D.C. Department of Corrections. I have personally experienced Solitary Confinement in the DOC, as well as State-sponsored prisons, and private institutions. The treatment and conditions within D.C. Jail's "solitary confinement space" are inhumane, and torturous, and have become even harsher since the jail first opened nearly 50 years ago. The DOC's solitary tactics include: verbal abuse, military-style physical assaults, and sleep deprivation. The DOC's attitude toward institutional safety and management is riddled with human rights violations and other forms of cruel and unusual punishment. It is now time to correct this approach to institutional management and evolve to a more effective strategy that offers a genuine opportunity for rehabilitation and aligns with the rights afforded to us all as fellow Americans and as human beings.

I am asking this committee to hold a hearing on the ERASE ACT, which was originally proposed by Councilmember Nadeau and seven of her colleagues. I am also asking that this hearing take place before May 2024. The time is NOW for us to collectively improve conditions at the D.C. Jail and jails and prisons all across the world.

Also, I would like to mention a very important concern regarding those housed in the DC Jail, who lack access to participate in the Performance Oversight Hearing process. Please create a mechanism for residents at the jail to present live testimony to this Committee regarding DOC.

Finally, Solitary Confinement is a cruel punishment commonly practiced in jails and prisons all over the world. From the Bureau of Prisons to the state penal systems, and especially the DC Department of Corrections.

Regardless of the circumstances or the jurisdiction, TORTURE IS TORTURE!

Councilwoman Pinto, I challenge you and your colleagues to travel to the D.C. Jail, visit its Solitary Confinement area, and talk to them, ask them, and LISTEN TO THEM! Don't just talk to the staff or the PR Team, talk to the Prisoners.

Thank you for your time. Respectfully,

Damon Donelson-Bey