

## Testimony of Matthew Herencia, aka “Tariq”

Performance Oversight Hearing on the D.C. Department of Corrections (DOC)  
February 27, 2025

### Lived Experience Must Inform Policy!

Good morning Chairwoman Pinto and members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Matthew Herencia, and I come before you not just as an advocate, but as someone who has lived through the realities of incarceration in D.C. I have firsthand experience with the very systems you oversee—including the devastating impact of solitary confinement.

If this Council truly wants to improve conditions inside the DC Jail, then hearing from people like me—people who have endured these conditions—is not just important, it’s essential. My testimony should not be a privilege; it should be a fundamental part of how you shape policy. But right now, **incarcerated individuals are denied the basic right to testify on their own experiences.**

I know the toll of solitary confinement—the way it strips away your humanity, isolates you from reality and makes reintegration even harder. Sitting alone for 23 hours a day, with no connection to the outside world, I had no voice. But what’s worse is that **even now, when I am out, the system is still trying to silence people like me.**

Imagine if, while I was inside, I had the chance to tell you—directly—what solitary confinement does to a person. **You would have heard about the mental toll, the anxiety, the depression, and the way it breaks people down rather than rehabilitating them.** Maybe policies would have changed sooner. Maybe conditions would have improved. But instead, voices like mine were ignored.

And it’s still happening. Right now, there are **people in DC DOC custody** who are experiencing policies they have no say in. **How can we create solutions if we refuse to listen to the people who actually live through the problem?** I’m here today because that has to change. **This Council must act to ensure that incarcerated individuals can provide oral testimony.** That means:

**Mandating a process for testimony from DOC residents.**

**Ensuring they are informed of upcoming hearings.**

**Holding DOC accountable for making this happen.**

Washington, D.C., has led the way in restoring voting rights for incarcerated people. Now, we must take the next step. If you want real solutions, **you need real voices.** We are more than statistics—we are people with lived experience, and that experience must inform policy.

Thank you.