

Testimony Submitted to City Council in Support of *Bill # 2173-2020*

Robert L. Cohen, MD; Member NYC Board of Correction

Thank you Chairman *Powers*, *Council Members: Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Darma V. Diaz, Robert F. Holden and Carlina Rivera* and *Bill sponsors Daniel Dromm, Public Advocate Williams, Council Members Lander, Reynoso, and again Councilmember Rivera*

*My name is Bobby Cohen. I am a physician. I have been a Council appointee to the NYC Board of Correction since 2009.*

More than six years ago the Board of Correction ended solitary confinement for those between 16 and 21. Prior to that bill, close to 25% of young adults were kept in solitary confinement by the Department of Correction. We also ended the option of placing seriously mentally ill persons in solitary.

I had hoped the Board of Correction would have passed its Restrictive Housing rule by now. Since we have not yet passed our Rule, which will cover very similar ground to the Council Bill, I appreciate the Council's commitment and continued leadership to ending solitary and I support this bill.

This action by New York City is long overdue. The Board of Correction resumed rulemaking last Winter because of the Council and the community's concern that our initial Rule did not end solitary, just limited it to 15 days. We resumed rulemaking to end solitary with the Mayor's support this year, but our timetable keeps getting pushed back. We have not yet published our Rule, although I am confident that we will, and will provide the support asked for in the Council's legislation.

We must end Solitary Confinement as soon as possible. During the years of the Board's Restrictive Housing rulemaking, thousands have suffered in solitary and were humiliated and

punished by being shackled and chained. These practices continue today. They must end.

Your bill will end these torturous practices. The Board's rule will also end routine punitive shackling. I know that there are many advocates here today who have comments and suggestions about the Council's bill. I look forward to hearing them.

As the Council's representative on the Board of Correction, and as a New Yorker, I'm very proud to endorse your effort to end solitary. I honor you for your proposal.

Robert L. Cohen, MD  
Member NYC Board of Correction  
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