

Testimony of Roger Clark before the Board of Correction meeting July 9, 2019

My name is Roger and I am from VOCAL-NY and the #HALTsolitary campaign. I am speaking to oppose the variance requests that would allow the Department of Correction to continue to get around the Board of Correction's limitations on solitary confinement in the City jails. I am also urging the Board of Correction and New York City to immediately end solitary confinement fully and completely. This is psychological torture any way you put it.

I spent over five years in solitary confinement but even one day can be torture. Some days, the walls of my cell seemed to close in on me. Imagine being stuck in an elevator – for hours, let alone days or weeks or months or years. All day and night, people would bang on their lockers and scream in agony.

Politicians talk a lot about having too many people with mental illness in jails and prisons, but they have to take ownership of the fact that many people enter these facilities relatively healthy and leave with tortured minds.

I was released from prison in 2012. Seven years later, I still feel the effects of my time in solitary.

People are people and nobody should be tortured.

The Board must end solitary confinement now. And you must also make sure that any alternatives to solitary are *real* alternatives and not solitary by another name, and that people can quickly have a clear path out of the alternatives.

The alternatives should be the opposite of solitary. Instead of isolation and torture, people should be out of their cells almost the whole day and should have meaningful engagement with other human beings and meaningful congregate programs to help address why they needed to be separated in the first place.

The CAPS program in New York City, the now closed Merle Cooper program in New York State, the RSVP program in San Francisco jails – all of these examples show that doing the opposite of solitary is what actually works to make jails and our communities safe. Programs and empowerment and meaningful human engagement in a real way –not just punishment & isolation.

How many more Layleen Polanco's and Kalief Browder's and Bradley Ballard's and so many others are there going to have to be taken before you finally end solitary confinement once and for all?

Thank you.