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September 27, 2021

Governor JB Pritzker  
Office of the Governor  
207 State House  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Pritzker:

On behalf of the ACLU of Illinois, I write to reaffirm our support for the Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project requesting commutation of the sentences of the now approximately 45 incarcerated people with serious mental illness who had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. All of the petitioners have received additional years, some even decades, added to their original sentences as a result of engaging in low-level conduct such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers.

Medical professionals have known for over 100 years that isolation is bad for human beings. There is an international consensus that solitary confinement is state torture. Yet most people housed at Pontiac remain isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings—virtually all of the time and for decades. The natural and inevitable reaction was to decompensate and lash out. In Pontiac, this predictable response led to more time in solitary, and ever-lengthening terms in prison.

Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions, which we created, is simply wrong. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen K. Connell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colleen K. Connell

Executive Director, ACLU of Illinois

September 27, 2021

To: Governor JB Pritzker

From: Dr. Amanda Klonsky, Research and Policy Fellow at the UCLA Law COVID Behind Bars Data Project

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center Dear

Governor Pritzker:

I am a member of the IL Juvenile Justice Commission, a career social worker, and educator who worked in the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center and Jail. I am a lecturer at the University of Chicago's Crown School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice. I am writing in support of the Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mentally illness, each of whom was prosecuted while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. I prepared an annual report for the CCJTDC Advisory Board on the long-term damage to communities that can result from the use of solitary confinement for youth. This situation highlights several of the same issues with mental illness and human rights.

The head of the Colorado Department of Corrections decided to spend one night in solitary confinement to understand the effects on his incarcerated populations. He describes the experience: "I couldn't make sense of any of it, and was left feeling twitchy and paranoid. I kept waiting for the lights to shift off to signal the end of the day, but the lights did not shift off. I begin to count the small holes carved in the walls and tiny grooves made by inmates who'd chipped away at the cell." This was not even *one full day* in confinement.

An incarcerated individual described, "the loneliness made me depressed and depression caused me to be angry, leading to a desire to hurt others and the first opportunity of release (whether I was being released from isolation or receiving a cellmate) I erupted like a volcano, directing violent forces at anyone in my path."

Numerous studies indicate that adults who have *no previous history* of mental health problems develop symptoms of psychiatric illness in solitary confinement. The impact on seriously mentally ill incarcerated people is therefore unimaginably detrimental. This form of torture very often leads to mental health decompensation, creating a downward spiral of behavior. Punishing people for their inevitable reaction to horrific conditions, recognized as torture by the UN, is simply wrong. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to solitary confinement.

Sincerely,

Dr. Amanda Klonsky  
[amandaklonsky@uchicago.edu](mailto:amandaklonsky@uchicago.edu)



July 12, 2021

Governor JB Pritzker

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker:

We at Black and Pink: Chicago are writing in support of the Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, each of whom was prosecuted while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center.

Black and Pink: Chicago is an open family of GLBTQ+ incarcerated folks and "free world" allies who support each other. Our work toward the abolition of the prison industrial complex is rooted in the experience of currently and formerly incarcerated people. We are outraged by the specific violence of the prison industrial complex against GLBTQ+ people, and respond through advocacy, education, direct service, and organizing. A report published by Black and Pink titled *Coming out of Concrete Closets: a Report on Black and Pink's National LGBTQ Prisoner Survey* showed that out of over 1,200 respondents incarcerated mostly in state and federal prisons "85% of respondents have been in solitary confinement at some point during their sentence; approximately half have spent 2 or more years there. Altogether, respondents have spent a total of 5,110 years in solitary confinement." The survey also found that "respondents with a mental illness diagnosis were more likely to be in solitary confinement at the time of the survey and more likely to have ever been in solitary confinement than survey respondents without such a diagnosis."

These filed petitions represent several dozen incarcerated people who have been designated as "seriously mentally ill" by the Illinois Department of Corrections and have been held in solitary confinement.

During prolonged solitary confinement, each of these petitioners engaged in low-level conduct such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers. Each then had their sentences prolonged by years, some even decades.

Medical and mental health professionals have known for over 100 years that isolation is bad for human beings. We are fundamentally social beings. Despite this long-established medical knowledge, most people housed at Pontiac remain isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings virtually all of the time for decades.

There is an international consensus that solitary confinement is state torture. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture in 2011, and the U.N. General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite solitary confinement, solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, and the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. The American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have opposed the use of solitary for individuals with serious mental illness.

People who are subjected to solitary confinement have documented a wide range of psychological reactions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, paranoia hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, hopelessness, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Together, these symptoms combine to form a “specific psychiatric syndrome associated with solitary confinement” that “has the characteristics of an acute organic brain syndrome.” Suicide rates and self-harm are disproportionately high among prisoners in solitary confinement.

Among prisoners with pre-existing mental illnesses—who make up a disproportionate number of prisoners in isolation—solitary confinement can lead to severe psychiatric decompensation and greater risk of self-injury. Studies have shown that solitary confinement can also trigger symptoms of anger, aggression, and loss of impulse control, which can lead to both self-injury and violence towards staff, like the throwing of waste.

When Pontiac tortured people with serious mental health issues by locking them in a room, depriving them of all social interaction, and essentially throwing away the key, the natural and inevitable reaction was to decompensate and lash out. In Pontiac, this predictable response to solitary only led to more time in solitary, and often to prosecution, or multiple prosecutions, and ever lengthening terms in prison, and in solitary.

Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions which we created is simply wrong. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.

Sincerely,  
Black and Pink: Chicago



BLACKROOTS ALLIANCE  
5061 S PRAIRIE AVE  
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(312) 248-4297

SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

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Dear Governor Pritzker:

My name is Katelyn Johnson, Executive Director of BlackRoots Alliance, and I am writing in support of the petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, each of whom had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions, which we created, is simply wrong. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and commute these sentences.

Our mission at BlackRoots Alliance is to support the safety and liberation of all Black people, heal our communities and fundamentally transform our society. Solitary confinement not only goes against our mission, it stands as a horrendous injury to our human nature. Solitary confinement exacerbates the turmoil of humans who are already experiencing mental health issues. Rather than providing the necessary and essential psychiatric care for people dealing with serious mental illness, their prison sentence was extended by years causing even further deterioration in their mental condition.

The prison industrial complex in general is inhumane and these specific incarcerated people deserve commutation. I urge you to take a stand for the dignity and humanity of all people and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Johnson, Executive Director



*September 9, 2021*

Governor JB Pritzker  
Office of the Governor, James R. Thompson Center  
100 W. Randolph, 16-100, Chicago, IL 60601

RE: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker,

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts writes this letter today in support of the petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for the commutation of dozens of incarcerated people experiencing serious mental illnesses -- each of whom had their sentences prolonged unfairly while being subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center (PCC). Chicago Appleseed's mission is to advocate for a more equitable and accessible legal system that offers justice without delay to all people. We have been publicly opposed to the cruelty of solitary confinement due to its impacts on mental health for some time, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the pursuit of justice, we are asking that you commute the sentences.

The Illinois Prison Project filed petitions for approximately 43 people who have been designated as "seriously mentally ill" by the Illinois Department of Corrections and have been held in solitary confinement for varying periods of time. During prolonged solitary confinement, these people are said to have engaged in conduct such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers; each then received years -- even decades -- added to their original sentences.

The impacts of solitary confinement on mental health are well-known and well-documented. Medical and mental health professionals have known for over 100 years that isolation is bad for human beings. We are fundamentally social beings. Despite this long-established knowledge, most people housed at PCC have remained isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings, constantly, over multiple decades of incarceration. There is international consensus that solitary confinement is state-sanctioned torture (the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture in 2011, and the U.N. General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite or excessive solitary confinement and the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities). The American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National

Alliance on Mental Illness have opposed the use of solitary confinement for individuals with serious mental illnesses; people who are subjected to solitary confinement have documented a wide range of adverse reactions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, social withdrawal, paranoia hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, hopelessness, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior, and can also trigger bouts of anger, aggression, and loss of impulse control, which can lead to both self-injury and violence towards others. Suicide rates and self harm are disproportionately high among prisoners in solitary confinement. This kind of treatment is not only unfair, but a fundamental human rights concern.

Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts hopes that, based on this information, you will actively support these petitions by the Illinois Prison Project and commute the sentences of these individuals. Punishing people for an inevitable reaction to torture at the hands of the Illinois Department of Corrections is not only morally unjust, but an abuse of the legal system. We urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Malcolm Rich, Executive Director  
Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts  
Email: [MalcolmRich@ChicagoAppleseed.org](mailto:MalcolmRich@ChicagoAppleseed.org)  
Phone: (312) 988-6565

CHICAGO  
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Dear Governor Pritzker,

I am writing in support of the petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, each of whom had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. As a researcher, mental health counselor, and educator who specializes in trauma counseling, I am greatly concerned with the egregious treatment of incarcerated persons within the Pontiac Correctional Center.

The petitions represent dozens of incarcerated people who have been designated as “seriously mentally ill” by the Illinois Department of Corrections and have been held in solitary confinement. During prolonged solitary confinement, each of these petitioners engaged in low-level conduct such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers.

As a result, all of the clients within this petition have received additional years, some even decades, added to their original sentences. The lengthening of prison sentences for such low-level infractions is unconscionable and appears to be motivated by a desire to keep each person within the prison system.

Numerous research studies have found that solitary confinement is torture and has deleterious and long lasting impact on the neurology and mental health of persons so confined. Humans are fundamentally relational beings, needing social contact to thrive and maintain wellness. The effects of solitary confinement compounds the mental distress of incarcerated persons who come into the prison system with significantly higher rates of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD that result from adverse childhood development are often significantly compounded in the penal system. Prison entails great threat to a person’s sense of being and can cause alterations to their personality that prolong after their release. Research confirms that suicide rates and self-harm are disproportionally high among prisoners in solitary confinement.

There is an international consensus that solitary confinement is state torture. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture in 2011, and the U.N. General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite solitary confinement, solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, and the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. The American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have opposed the use of solitary for individuals with serious mental illness.



Prolonging the sentences of persons who are already under tremendous stress, for infractions motivated by the inhumane treatment of solitary confinement is nefarious. I implore you to use your power as Governor to restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric M. Brown', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eric M. Brown, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Counseling and Special Education  
College of Education | DePaul University  
(cell) 352-219-9831  
[2247 N. Halstead Street | Chicago, IL 60614](#)



Dear Governor Pritzker,

I've worked with prisoners for many decades (in federal as well as state facilities) and agree completely that for the vast majority of prisoners anything other than a short stay in solitary is extremely stressful and, indeed, traumatizing. Many prisoners find that this isolation is not only stressful in itself but also evokes past trauma, particularly strong and detrimental feelings about having been abandoned or abused earlier in life. It is a practice that should be severely restricted, and those prisoners who are subjected to it should be carefully monitored.

I am a board certified psychiatrist, was a long-time researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health, and am a Clinical Professor at Georgetown Medical School.

James S. Gordon, MD  
Founder and Executive Director  
The Center for Mind-Body Medicine



## Advancing the human and civil rights of people with disabilities

SELF-ADVOCACY ASSISTANCE ★ LEGAL SERVICES ★ DISABILITY RIGHTS EDUCATION ★ PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY ★ ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

Governor JB Pritzker

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker:

We are writing in support of the petition for people with serious mental illness filed by the Illinois Prison Project. This is an important effort to protect people with serious mental illness who are being over-incarcerated as a direct result of mental illness. While subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center, people with serious mental illness had their sentences lengthened for engaging in exactly the behaviors that are widely known to result from their isolated conditions of confinement.

Equip for Equality is an independent non-profit disability rights organization. EFE is designated to administer the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system for the State of Illinois. We are charged with protecting the rights of Illinois residents to be free from discrimination based on disability including people with mental illness under the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness ("PAIMI") program under 42 USC 10801 *et seq.* This charge is particularly important when it comes to people with mental disabilities in our State's large institutions, including prisons, where they have long been harmed by abuse and neglect.

Equip for Equality also serves as legal counsel for all people in need of mental health treatment who are incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections in the *Rasho v. Jeffreys* litigation. The case was filed in 2007 and continues under a 2016 settlement agreement that requires extensive reforms and system development. Specifically relevant here, under the *Rasho* settlement, the State agreed to drastically increase the amount of out-of-cell time (for both treatment and unstructured activities, such as yard) to a minimum of twenty-hours per week as well as developing a framework of treatment requirements, including regular assessments and interventions to prevent or respond to any worsening of mental illness in segregation.

These requirements were based on the science and research on the impact of isolation on mental health. As explained further below, when subjected to the kind of segregation and restrictions that the petitioners here were confined in at Pontiac, their existing mental illness will worsen, and behavioral acting will be one significant consequence. Incarcerated people with serious mental illness often have poor impulse control in the best of situations, but when their anxiety, depressions, hallucinations, and paranoia are exacerbated by isolated conditions, they often engage in behaviors that include self-harm, property destruction (including in the act of self-

*THE INDEPENDENT, FEDERALLY MANDATED PROTECTION & ADVOCACY SYSTEM FOR THE STATE OF ILLINOIS*

MARK P. ROTATORI, BOARD CHAIRPERSON ZENA NAIDITCH, PRESIDENT & CEO

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harm and/or in an effort to get the attention of staff), throwing objects or liquid out of their cells, and assaults on staff.<sup>1</sup>

In 2019, the United States District Court found the *Rasho* settlement terms designed to prevent decompensation of mental health in segregation were being violated and the failures were resulting in widespread violations of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights of Illinois prisoners with mental illness. *Rasho v. Walker*, 376 F. Supp. 3d 888, 917 (C.D. Ill. 2019). The court specifically found that continuing isolation in disciplinary segregation—which meets the definition of “solitary confinement”<sup>2</sup>—were causing serious harm to people with mental illness throughout the prison system. *Id.* at 908-912. As a result, the Court entered a permanent injunction requiring further reforms, including the out-of-cell activity and treatment necessary to prevent decompensation of mental illness.

During the 2018 evidentiary hearing that led to the permanent injunction, Dr. Melvin Hinton, the Chief of Mental Health for the IDOC, testified that people with mental illness tend to have more behavioral incidents in prison because of their mental illness, which results in them being placed in segregation disproportionately to people without mental illness. *Id.* at 899 (citing testimony). Dr. Hinton went on to explain that there was “nothing that was good” about them being in segregation and without the treatment they needed to withstand the conditions of segregation—which IDOC was not providing—they were “across the board” getting worse. *Id.* This includes the petitioners here, who are indeed getting worse in that system. The response to their mental and behavioral disintegration, unfortunately, was not therapeutic but punitive which only exacerbated the problem with more segregation and incarceration.

Chief Hinton’s view that Illinois prisoners with mental illness were getting worse in segregation without the treatment that they required was well supported in the caselaw and by the science, as well as his own experience in the Illinois prison system. Denial of social interaction and environmental stimuli—the hallmark of solitary confinement—“exact a terrible price.” *Davis v. Ayala*, 135 S. Ct. 2187, 2210 (2015) (Kennedy, J., concurring). Scientific research has demonstrated “strikingly consistent” results showing that the deprivation of meaningful social contact and environmental stimulation arising from solitary confinement imposes grave

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<sup>1</sup> See *Rasho v. Walker*, 376 F. Supp. 3d 888, 908 (C.D. Ill. 2019) (explaining that “[s]egregation can also cause a degradation of coping mechanisms and lead to increases in self-harm and other acting-out behaviors.).

<sup>2</sup> Solitary confinement is defined as cell confinement for 22 hours or more without meaningful human interactions. See Rule 44, U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners (2015). Rule 44 further defines “prolonged solitary confinement” as time periods in excess of 15 consecutive days, and prohibit it as “cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.” The Mandela Rules further call for the total prohibition on solitary confinement for people with mental or physical conditions that will be exacerbated by the conditions. Rule 45. The American Correctional Association defines “extended solitary confinement” as more than 29 days. Standard 4-RH-0027, Restrictive Housing Standards (2016). The National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) states that, “Prolonged (greater than 15 consecutive days) solitary confinement is cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment, and harmful to an individual’s health.” Position Paper, available at: <https://www.ncchc.org/solitary-confinement>.

psychological and physiological harms.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, experts have recognized that the chronic stress imposed by such isolation “can be as clinically distressing as physical torture.”<sup>4</sup> Psychological injuries from solitary confinement include cognitive dysfunction, severe depression, memory loss, anxiety, paranoia, panic, hallucinations, and stimuli hypersensitivity.<sup>5</sup>

In *Williams v. Secretary of the Penn. Dep’t of Corr.*, 848 F.3d 549, 566-68 (3d Cir. 2017), the court summarized the extensive legal and scientific authority regarding physical and psychological harms of solitary confinement, finding that:

A comprehensive meta-analysis of the existing literature on solitary confinement within and beyond the criminal justice setting found that “[t]he empirical record compels an unmistakable conclusion: this experience is psychologically painful, can be traumatic and harmful, and puts many of those who have been subjected to it at risk of long-term ... damage.” Specifically, based on an examination of a representative sample of sensory deprivation studies, the researchers found that virtually *everyone* exposed to such conditions is affected in some way. They further explained that “[t]here is not a single study of solitary confinement wherein non-voluntary confinement that lasted for longer than 10 days failed to result in negative psychological effects.”

*Williams*, 848 F.3d at 566 (internal citations omitted). The results of solitary confinement most frequently include anxiety, panic, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, hallucinations, paranoia, claustrophobia, and suicidal ideation. *Id.* at 566. Isolation not only will exacerbate symptoms of mental illness but will cause cognitive harms to people with mental illness that are “toxic to mental functioning.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Craig Haney, The Psychological Effects of Solitary Confinement: A Systematic Critique, 47 Crime & Justice 365, 367-68, 370-75 (2018) (collecting studies); see also Stuart Grassian, Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement, 22 Wash. U. J. L. & Pol’y 325, 335-38 (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey L. Metzner & Jamie Fellner, Solitary Confinement and Mental Illness in U.S. Prisons: A Challenge for Medical Ethics, 38 J. Am. Acad. Psychiatry & L. 104, 104 (2010); United Nations, Interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment ¶ 76 (Aug. 2011) (“Special Rapporteur reiterates that, in his view, any imposition of solitary confinement beyond 15 days constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment ....”) (available at <http://solitaryconfinement.org/uploads/SpecRapTortureAug2011.pdf>)

<sup>5</sup> See Craig W. Haney, Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Solitary and “Supermax” Confinement, 49 Crime & Delinquency 124, 130-31, 134 (2003) (collecting studies); Terry A. Kupers, Isolated Confinement: Effective Method for Behavior Change or Punishment for Punishment’s Sake?, in Routledge Handbook of International Crime and Justice Studies 213, 216 (Bruce Arrigo & Heather Bersot eds., 2013); Peter Scharff Smith, The Effects of Solitary Confinement on Prison Inmates: A Brief History and Review of the literature, 34 Crime & Just. 441, 488–90 (2006)

<sup>6</sup> See Stuart Grassian, Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement, 22 Wash. U. J.L. & Pol’y 325, 333 (2006) (“even a few days of solitary confinement will predictably shift the electroencephalogram (EEG) pattern toward an abnormal pattern characteristic of stupor and delirium” and referring to solitary as “strikingly toxic to mental functioning.”). See also *Rasho*, 376 F.Supp.3d at 908-909.

Here in Illinois, Pontiac Correctional Center was previously dedicated to long-term segregation housing. At Pontiac, time and again, we have seen how the impact of isolation on mental illness degrades the individual's coping skills and functioning. In the stressful environment at Pontiac, and with often-challenging staff interactions, people with serious mental illness, including the petitioners here, often spiraled downward in their mental illness, resulting behavioral acting out. Their disciplinary cards ran for pages and pages with one ticket after another for often minor disciplinary infractions that compounded month after month of segregation and other restrictions resulting in the loss of the very things they needed most—from fresh air and exercise to the TV and radio privileges to visitation and commissary.

The State and the IDOC have committed to changing these harmful practices and conditions of confinement. Both with the *Rasho* settlement and through its own reforms, IDOC has drastically reduced the use of disciplinary segregation in recent years.

While we all look forward to a day when people with serious mental illness are not harmed further by the conditions of their custody, the consequences of the harms already done continue to plague the petitioners. While the State moves forward to prevent the problematic practices of the past from continuing, we strongly urge you to use your authority as Governor to commute the petitioners' sentences that are the direct consequences of those same harmful conditions and practices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zena Naiditch', written in a cursive style.

Zena Naiditch  
President & CEO



70 E. LAKE ST., STE 410  
CHICAGO, IL 60601  
(312) 291-9183  
THEJHA.ORG

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August 23, 2021

Dear Governor Pritzker:

I write in support of the Petitions for Commutation filed by the Illinois Prison Project (“IPP”) on behalf of the many incarcerated people who suffer from serious mental illness and had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center.

The John Howard Association (“JHA”) is an independent citizen correctional oversight organization, we monitor correctional facilities in Illinois, pushing for increased transparency and advancing reforms necessary to achieve a fair, humane and effective criminal justice system. During our prison monitoring visits we observe and evaluate conditions of confinement and speak with incarcerated people and correctional staff and administrators in order to learn about their experiences and perceptions of treatment within the system. The wellbeing and humanity of everyone who is in prison is of deep concern to JHA, as are system functionality, transparency, and accountability. JHA is well aware of the issues presented in these petitions which include deficient medical and mental health care for people in prison and disciplinary procedures that lack sufficient due process. Together, these system inadequacies negatively impact everyone in custody, and exacerbate the struggles of the people in prison who experience mental illness. As we have emphasized in our work at the John Howard Association, we believe that an essential part of respecting human dignity entails affording all people, even individuals with little chance of returning to free society, humane living conditions and treatment and the opportunity to receive care and engage in rehabilitation. This is unachievable through prolonged isolation.

Without question isolation has been overused and done substantial harm to people in Illinois’ correctional facilities. The high costs of isolation extend beyond prison walls. Isolation leads to increased institutional violence, exacerbation of prisoners’ healthcare issues, litigation, extended prison stays due to individuals acting out while in isolation, and heightened recidivism. This is particularly true when dealing with people struggling with mental illness.

The petitions IPP filed are on behalf of incarcerated people who have been designated as “seriously mentally ill” by the Illinois Department of Corrections and have been held in solitary confinement. During prolonged solitary confinement, each of these petitioners engaged in low-level conduct such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers. Each petitioner then received additional years, some even decades, added to their original sentence due to behavior that was in direct response to the extreme duress caused by their being put in isolation.

**Defying Injustice. Defending Humanity.**

Medical and mental health professionals established many years ago that isolation is detrimental to people. Despite this information being well known and accepted, many people housed at Pontiac Correctional Center remain isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings virtually all of the time for long periods of time. There is international consensus that solitary confinement constitutes torture; in 2011 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture, subsequent to which the United Nations General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite solitary confinement, solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, and the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. In addition to this, the American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have all opposed the use of solitary confinement for individuals with serious mental illness.

It is well documented and JHA has witnessed in Illinois prisons that people who are subjected to solitary confinement have a wide range of psychological reactions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, paranoia hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, hopelessness, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Suicide rates and self-harm are disproportionately high among prisoners in solitary confinement. Among prisoners with pre-existing mental illnesses—who make up a disproportionate number of prisoners in isolation—solitary confinement can lead to severe psychiatric decompensation and greater risk of self-injury. Studies have shown that solitary confinement can also trigger symptoms of anger, aggression, and loss of impulse control, which can lead to both self-injury and violence towards staff, like the throwing of waste. When people with serious mental health issues at Pontiac were isolated and deprived of all social interaction, the natural and inevitable reaction was to decompensate and lash out. This predictable response to spending time in solitary confinement began a downward spiral of increased time in isolation for people already decompensating due to the effects of it and also to new and sometimes multiple prosecutions for the behavior stemming from growing mental health decompensation due to isolation. Thus, those most struggling were not given care, their distress resulted in behavior that led to ever lengthening terms in isolation and to their prison sentences.

Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions which we created is simply wrong. The John Howard Association urges you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before correctional practices led to their mental health decompensation which created a downward spiral of behavior and ineffective, unfair response.



Jennifer Vollen-Katz

Executive Director, John Howard Association

[jvollen@thejha.org](mailto:jvollen@thejha.org); 312-291-9183 xt. 205



September 7, 2021

*Via U.S. mail*  
Governor J.B. Pritzker  
Office of the Governor  
James R. Thompson Center  
100 W. Randolph, 16-100  
Chicago, IL 60601

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker:

I write in support of the approximately 45 Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for incarcerated individuals with serious mental illness whose sentences were prolonged due to expressions of mental illness while subjected to lengthy solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. Punishing people for their inevitable reaction to the horrific conditions the State has forced them to endure is simply wrong. These individuals deserve commutation.

Loevy & Loevy is dedicated to ensuring that the constitutional and basic human rights of incarcerated individuals are respected. As one of the largest civil rights law firms in Illinois, our firm has represented hundreds of individuals who have been mistreated by state actors, including incarcerated individuals who have been relegated to solitary confinement rather than being given the basic medical and mental health care they need and deserve.

The Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project represent approximately 45 incarcerated individuals who have been designated as “seriously mentally ill” by the IDOC and held in solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time. While in solitary, these individuals engaged in low-level conduct like spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional staff, and had their sentences prolonged due to this minor conduct.

The conditions these individuals were held in are widely regarded by medical and mental health experts as extremely harmful. People subjected to solitary confinement have documented a wide range of psychological reactions, including anxiety, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, cognitive dysfunction, auditory and visual hallucinations, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Experts have concluded that these symptoms combine to form a particular psychiatric syndrome associated with solitary confinement that has the characteristics of an acute organic brain syndrome.

There is a wide consensus that solitary confinement is state torture. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture in 2011, and the U.N. General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite solitary

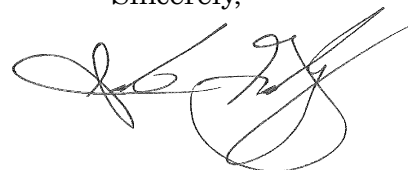
confinement, or the use of solitary confinement of any length on persons with mental or physical disabilities. The American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness have opposed the use of solitary for individuals with serious mental illness.

It is also widely acknowledged that individuals who are relegated to solitary confinement for prolonged periods—especially those with underlying mental illnesses—often react to the psychological damage inflicted on them through the type of low-level conduct for which the petitioners were criminally prosecuted. We are fundamentally social beings and it should be easy to understand why a person who has been stripped of any ability to make meaningful social contact would resort to low-level misconduct in order to have some interaction with another human being, even if that interaction is a negative one.

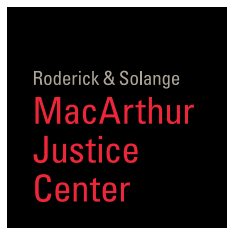
This is precisely what happened to the petitioners. When Pontiac tortured these individuals, all of whom had serious mental health issues, by locking them in a room, depriving them of all social interaction, and essentially throwing away the key, the natural and inevitable reaction was to decompensate and lash out. But at Pontiac, this predictable and understandable response to solitary only led to more time in solitary and to criminal prosecution, which in turn dramatically extended the petitioners' prison sentences and caused even further deterioration of their mental conditions.

Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions that we have created is simply wrong. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Grady', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Sarah Grady



**Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center**

160 East Grand Ave., 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

Chicago, Illinois 60611

O 312 503 0899

F (312) 503-0891

macarthurjustice.org

August 18, 2021

Honorable JB Pritzker  
Governor of the State of Illinois  
James R. Thompson Center  
100 West Randolph, 16-100  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker:

We write to express our utmost support for the commutation petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project, seeking commutation for 43 incarcerated individuals who unjustly had their sentences lengthened due to low-level conduct committed in solitary confinement despite being seriously mentally ill.

The Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center has a strong interest in the granting of these commutations. We are a public interest law firm that advocates for human rights and social justice through litigation. For over 30 years, the MacArthur Justice Center has been at the forefront of challenging injustices in the criminal legal system. We advocate, whenever possible, for real, systemic change for those living behind bars. As one of the premier civil rights organizations in the United States, the MacArthur Justice Center represents individuals and organizations in trial litigation across the country – including at home in Illinois. And we are convinced that the extended sentences of mentally ill persons for conduct that occurred while in solitary confinement represents a dark stain on the moral fabric of our State.

Medical and mental health professionals have long been sounding the alarm as to the detrimental impact that isolation can have on humans. There is now international consensus that solitary confinement is state-sanctioned torture. In 2011, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture. Furthermore, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution prohibiting: (1) indefinite solitary confinement, (2) solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, and (3) the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities.


In the United States, the American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness – all oppose the use of solitary confinement for people with serious mental illness. This is because, people subject to solitary confinement have a wide range of adverse psychological reactions: including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, paranoia hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction,

hallucinations, hopelessness, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Mental illness combined with solitary confinement is known to form a specific psychiatric syndrome, which has the characteristics of an acute organic brain disease. This explains why suicide and self-harm are disproportionately common among prisoners in solitary confinement.

Despite this devastating reality, many Illinois prisoners have been subjected to solitary confinement and isolated from any meaningful social contact for decades. The petitions filed by Illinois Prison Project represent 43 people who have been held in solitary confinement, despite being designated by the Illinois Department of Corrections as “seriously mentally ill.” During their prolonged solitary confinement, each of these petitioners engaged in low-level conduct (such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers). Each then had their sentences prolonged for years or even decades for these minor infractions.

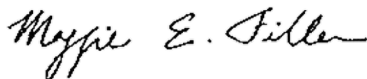
We urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state-sanctioned torture.

Sincerely yours,



Alexa Van Brunt

Director, MacArthur Justice Center of Illinois



Maggie E. Filler

Staff Attorney, MacArthur Justice Center of Illinois



August 12, 2021

The Honorable J. B. Pritzker  
Governor of Illinois  
100 West Randolph Street  
Suite 16-100  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Persons with Serious Mental Illnesses at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker:

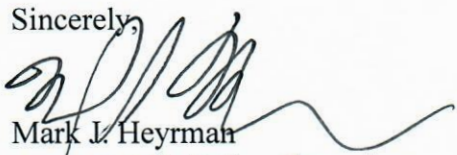
I write on behalf of Mental Health America of Illinois (MHAI) to support the petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for the commutation of sentences for people with serious mental illnesses subjected to lengthy solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. MHAI, which was founded by Jane Addams more than a century ago, is the oldest state-wide mental health advocacy organization in Illinois. We are an affiliate of Mental Health America, a national mental health advocacy organization, also more than a century old, which has affiliates in more than thirty-five states.

The Illinois Prison Project has filed petitions to commute the sentences of more than forty persons at Pontiac Correctional Center. We support these petitions for the following reasons:

- More than 20% of the Illinois prison population suffers from serious mental illnesses. Unfortunately, Illinois has never provided its prison population with adequate mental health services. The federal court overseeing the pending *Rasho v. Jeffreys* class action against the Department of Corrections (DOC) has repeatedly found that the services DOC is providing to persons with mental illnesses are inadequate.
- The failure to provide adequate mental health services to prisoners has predictably bad results. These prisoners sometimes engage in behaviors which result in their being placed in solitary confinement for prolonged periods. However, research has consistently shown that solitary confinement, particularly for prolonged periods, worsens mental illnesses and leads inmates to engage in aggressive and assaultive behavior against correctional officers. Indeed, prolonged solitary confinement can cause otherwise healthy persons to experience mental illnesses. For these reasons, all of the major mental health organizations, including Mental Health America, have long condemned the use of solitary confinement on persons with mental illnesses.
- The problems caused by placing persons with mental illnesses in solitary confinement exists across all DOC facilities. However, this has become a particular problem in Pontiac even when these crimes are caused by the untreated mental illnesses of inmates and excessive solitary confinement employed by Pontiac. As a result, persons with mental illnesses are imprisoned for years, if not decades beyond their original sentence.

The Honorable J. B. Pritzker  
August 12, 2021  
Page Two

For the reasons stated above, we urge you to grant the petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project to commute the sentences of persons with serious mental illnesses at Pontiac. These individuals desperately need treatment which is not available to them at Pontiac. Because their crimes were caused by solitary confinement and the lack of treatment, releasing these persons to treatment in the community, where they will be free from solitary confinement, will not endanger the community. Thus, no legitimate penological purpose is served by their continued confinement. This confinement is harmful to the petitioners and wasteful of state resources.

Sincerely,  
  
Mark J. Heyrman  
Chair, Public Policy Committee  
Writer's direct line: 773-852-1408  
markheyрман@outlook.com





August 17, 2102

Michael E. Deutsch  
Ben H. Elson  
Janine L. Holt  
Joey L. Mogul  
Christian Snow  
John L. Stainthorp  
Jan Susler  
G. Flint Taylor Jr.  
Brad J. Thomson

*Of Counsel*  
Jeffrey H. Haos  
Sarah Gelsomino

Dear Governor Pritzker,

We are writing to urge you to grant the Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutations on behalf of dozens of imprisoned people, who suffer from serious mental illness, and while improperly subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac prison, predictably and desperately acted out by spitting and throwing things at the guards while locked in isolation. These men then received substantial additional prison time.

We are the People's Law Office, who for more than 50 years have represented federal and state prisoners whose human and constitutional rights have been violated by prison authorities. We have challenged the use long term isolation in sensory deprivation cells in the Special Programs Unit at Stateville Correctional Center and the Marion Federal Prison. We have worked with psychological experts who have testified in court that long-term isolation creates severe psychiatric damage causing self injury, as well as anger, aggression and lack of self-control, which leads to the throwing objects at the guards.

We have also represented prisoners at Attica State prison in New York in 1971, who rebelled against the inhumane conditions and were slaughtered by State police and prison guards who killed 10 of their own. We also represented those who survived and were tortured and systematically beaten, which the United States Court of Appeals called "an orgy of brutality." In addition, our office represented 17 rebelling prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center in the late 70's, who responded to extreme heat and terrible conditions, and who faced the death penalty. Luckily all were acquitted by a Cook County jury or had their cases dismissed.

So we are well familiar with the illegal and horrific treatment of people in prison. The treatment of those at Pontiac who were mentally ill, or became so after months in sensory deprivation, and then received more prison time, is fundamentally wrong and must be addressed and corrected.

Governor, we urge you to exercise your clemency power to rectify this unfair and unconstitutional treatment and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were punished for the very conditions that were caused or exacerbated by their placement in sensory deprivation isolation.

Respectfully,

Flint Taylor

Jan Susler

For the Peoples Law Office



Romanucci & Blandin, LLC  
321 N. Clark Street, Suite 900  
Chicago, IL 60654  
[www.rblaw.net](http://www.rblaw.net)

August 20, 2021

Governor JB Pritzker

**Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center**

Dear Governor Pritzker:

I am writing in support of the Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, each of whom had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center.

My law firm, Chicago-based Romanucci & Blandin, and I represent Anthony Gay in his civil matter against the Illinois Department of Corrections for the inhumane conditions he experienced in his 20 years of solitary confinement. During that time, Anthony, who suffered from serious mental health ailments, was deprived of appropriate mental health care. In addition to this deprivation violating his Constitutional rights, it was tragically detrimental to his well-being.

One of the facilities where he was mistreated in this manner was Pontiac Correctional Center. The cycle of his experience at that facility is one that many others suffer on a daily basis in Illinois. Having a serious mental illness affects a person's ability to regulate their behavior; Anthony was no exception. He, like many other incarcerated people living with mental illnesses, engaged in low-level misconduct with correctional officers as a result of his condition. For each instance of this behavior, Anthony's sentence was prolonged by years. This solitude caused Anthony to engage in horrific self-mutilation, including cutting his limbs and inserting foreign bodies under his skin.



**Isolation is devastating, particularly on those with serious mental illness.**

Medical and mental health professionals have known for over 100 years that isolation is bad for human beings. We are fundamentally social beings. Despite this long-established medical knowledge, most people housed at Pontiac remain isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings virtually all of the time for decades.

There is an international consensus that solitary confinement is state torture. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture in 2011, and the U.N. General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite solitary confinement, solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, and the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. The American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have opposed the use of solitary for individuals with serious mental illness.

People who are subjected to solitary confinement have documented a wide range of psychological reactions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, paranoia hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, hopelessness, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Together, these symptoms combine to form a “specific psychiatric syndrome associated with solitary confinement” that “has the characteristics of an acute organic brain syndrome.”

Additionally, suicide rates and self-harm are disproportionally high among prisoners in solitary confinement.

**As a civilized society, we need to stop prosecuting people with serious mental illness for the inevitable reaction to torture.**

Among prisoners with pre-existing mental illnesses—who make up a disproportionate number of prisoners in isolation-solitary confinement can lead to severe psychiatric decompensation and greater risk of self-injury. Studies have shown that solitary confinement can also trigger symptoms of anger, aggression, and loss of impulse control, which can lead to both self-injury and violence towards staff, like the throwing of waste.

When Pontiac tortured people with serious mental health issues by locking them in a room, depriving them of all social interaction, and essentially throwing away the key, the natural and inevitable reaction was to decompensate and lash out. In Pontiac, this predictable response to solitary only led to more time in solitary, and ever lengthening terms in prison, and in solitary.

**We ask you: Commute these sentences.**

Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions which we created is simply wrong. Illinois has the opportunity to recognize the dignity and humanity of its incarcerated citizens, and to set an example for other states as we re-consider mental health in the carceral setting. The time to act is today. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.

Sincerely,



Nicolette Ward

Attorney, Romanucci & Blandin

[nward@rblaw.net](mailto:nward@rblaw.net)

312-458-1000



**Restore Justice**  
**PO Box 101099**  
**Chicago, IL 60610**  
O: (312) 809-6992

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Alice Swan  
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July 22, 2021

The Honorable JB Pritzker  
Governor of Illinois  
100 W. Randolph St.  
Chicago, IL 60601

Re: Commutation of Sentences for Prisoners at Pontiac Correctional Center

Dear Governor Pritzker,

Restore Justice supports the petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, each of whom had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. At Restore Justice, we advocate for fairness, humanity, and compassion throughout the Illinois criminal justice system. We engage regularly with currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, all of whom are deeply affected and impacted by conditions of incarceration, including solitary confinement. We believe that every human being deserves dignity and stand strongly with the petitioners.

Extensive research shows the practice of subjecting individuals to extreme isolation causes pain, suffering, and psychological trauma lasting for years beyond the individual's sentence. The conditions of solitary confinement elicit a wide range of psychological reactions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, paranoia, hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. As such, more than 15 days in solitary confinement is considered torture under international standards. These reactions are even more pronounced for prisoners with pre-existing mental illnesses, who often experience severe psychiatric decompensation and greater risk of self-injury. Studies have shown that solitary confinement can also trigger anger, aggression, and loss of impulse control, which can lead to behavior like the throwing of waste.

The petitioners needed acute mental health care, but instead were given extended sentences for conduct related to isolation. During their prolonged solitary confinement, each of the petitioners engaged in low-level defiant behaviors, such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers. Each then received additional years, some even decades, added to their original sentence. This leads to years of extra and unnecessary prison time, causing even further deterioration of their mental condition. Further, these sentences increase the time mentally ill people continue to reside in Illinois prisons, exposing corrections staff to escalating defiant behavior as mental health deteriorates.

Punishing and prosecuting people for expected reactions to horrific conditions that our state has created is simply wrong. I urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.

Sincerely,

Jobi Cates  
Founder  
Restore Justice Illinois

September 20, 2021

Dear Governor Pritzker:

I am writing on behalf of Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation (SOUL). SOUL believes that our faith calls us to the fight for justice for all, especially those who have historically been marginalized and oppressed. Our mission is to assist low-income people of color in the Chicago Southland to build power, then leverage power to fight for their own interest and liberation. We achieve this mission by partnering with congregations, people of faith and local community groups, training them in disciplined organizing strategies, to build leadership, inform and impact public policy, engage in direction action, and hold their elected representatives accountable to the interest of their communities.

This correspondence is to express our support of the Petitions filed by the Illinois Prison Project for commutation for dozens of incarcerated people with serious mentally illness, each of whom had their sentence lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. These petitions approximately 40 incarcerated people who have been designated as “seriously mentally ill” by the Illinois Department of Corrections and have been held in solitary confinement.

Medical and mental health professionals have known for over 100 years that isolation is bad for human. We are fundamentally social beings. Despite this long-established medical knowledge, most people housed at Pontiac remain isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings virtually all of the time for decades. As people of faith, we must proclaim that this is absolutely unjust!

Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions which we created is simply wrong. We urge you to use your constitutional power as Governor to end this cycle and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture .

Sincerely,



Tanya Watkins  
Executive Director  
SOUL

# THE PEOPLE'S LOBBY

September 20, 2021

Dear Governor Pritzker:

I am writing on behalf of The People's Lobby to encourage you to commute the sentences of dozens of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, each of whom had their sentences lengthened while subjected to prolonged solitary confinement at Pontiac Correctional Center. As you may be aware, the People's Lobby is an organization of people across the Chicago region who work together for racial, economic, and environmental justice and were proud to be one of the anchor organizations in the Coalition to End Money Bond campaign that worked in partnership with your office and the Black Caucus to pass legislation ending money bail across the state.

The people we are asking you to help are people suffering from mental illness who have suffered from an abusive prison system and continue to be punished for their reactions to the abuse they continue to suffer. These petitions represent approximately 45 incarcerated people who have been designated as "seriously mentally ill" by the Illinois Department of Corrections and have been held in solitary confinement. During prolonged solitary confinement, each of these petitioners engaged in low-level conduct such as spitting, throwing water or urine, or making physical contact with correctional officers. Each then had their sentences lengthened by years or even decades for this low-level conduct.

Isolation for people in prison is medically and morally indefensible and bad policy that worsens the cycle of harm and abuse. People are fundamentally social beings. Despite this long-established medical knowledge, most people housed at Pontiac remain isolated from meaningful social contact with other human beings virtually all of the time for decades.

There is an international consensus that solitary confinement is state torture. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture declared prolonged solitary confinement a form of torture in 2011, and the U.N. General Assembly passed rules prohibiting indefinite solitary confinement, solitary confinement in excess of 15 days, and the imposition of solitary confinement of any length on women, children, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. The American Psychiatric Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, have opposed the use of solitary for individuals with serious mental illness.

People who are subjected to solitary confinement have documented a wide range of psychological reactions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic, withdrawal, paranoia, hypersensitivity, cognitive dysfunction, hallucinations, hopelessness, self-mutilation, and suicidal ideation and behavior. Together, these symptoms combine to form a "specific psychiatric syndrome associated with solitary confinement" that "has the characteristics of an acute organic brain syndrome."

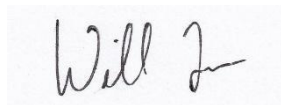
The situation at Pontiac amounts to prosecuting people with serious mental illness for their inevitable reaction to torture.

Among prisoners with pre-existing mental illnesses—who make up a disproportionate number of prisoners in isolation—solitary confinement can lead to severe psychiatric decompensation and greater risk of self-injury. Studies have shown that solitary confinement can also trigger symptoms of anger, aggression, and loss of impulse control, which can lead to both self-injury and violence towards staff, like the throwing of waste.

When Pontiac tortured people with serious mental health issues by locking them in a room, depriving them of all social interaction, and essentially throwing away the key, the natural and inevitable reaction was to decompensate and lash out. In Pontiac, this predictable response to solitary only led to more time in solitary, and ever lengthening terms in prison, and in solitary.

**In conclusion, we are requesting that you use your constitutional power as Governor to commute these sentences and restore this vulnerable group to sentences they were intended to serve before they were subjected to state torture.** Punishing people for the inevitable reaction to horrific conditions which we created is simply wrong. Thank you in advance for considering this request to end this cycle and commute these sentences.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Will Tanzman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Will Tanzman, Executive Director