



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS DENOUNCE STATE TORTURE IN ILLINOIS PRISONS**

*Advocates condemn solitary confinement, criminalization of mental illness*

CHICAGO — The Illinois Prison Project and civil rights advocates today called on the Illinois Department of Corrections and State of Illinois to end the practice of punishing people with mental illnesses for natural conduct stemming from time in solitary confinement.

IPP on Tuesday filed executive clemency petitions on behalf of 43 clients who have been identified by IDOC as seriously mentally ill. Despite this designation, each client spent, on average, a decade in solitary confinement and received an average of 15 years of additional incarceration because of this torture. Collectively, their sentences were prolonged more than eight centuries.

“The unending isolation of solitary confinement would have a profound mental and physical toll on anyone, but its effects are devastating for people with severe mental illnesses,” **said Jennifer Soble, executive director of the Illinois Prison Project.** “It is unconscionable that our clients were tortured then further punished with additional prison time. The state must immediately remove the extra years our clients have been condemned to serve as a product of this barbaric practice, and must immediately stop using solitary confinement.”

“I was trapped in a windowless cage for more than 20 years,” **said Corey Knox, a formerly incarcerated person with a history of mental illness.** “The suffocating seclusion left me with physical and emotional scars that I will carry for the rest of my life. Governor Pritzker, please exercise your leadership and end this suffering.”

[Experts agree](#) that [extended solitary confinement](#) is [torture](#). People subjected to solitary confinement have [documented](#) a range of psychological reactions, including paranoia, hallucinations and suicidal ideations. These effects are especially pronounced for people with mental illnesses.

While in solitary, each client engaged in low-level conduct such as spitting or throwing urine. They needed mental health care. Instead, they received extended prison sentences because of natural and inevitable reactions.

Every Illinois prison tortures people with prolonged solitary confinement. But the practice is especially pervasive at Pontiac Correctional Center. In June, 60 of the 70 people in isolation had mental illnesses. And despite making up less than 15% of the Illinois population, nine out of every 10 people in solitary confinement at Pontiac were Black, as of June.



“Solitary confinement doesn’t just target and torture people who live with mental illness — it’s also a form of racialized state violence that disproportionately affects Black people,” **said Sheila Bedi, clinical professor of law at Northwestern University and a civil rights lawyer.** “At Pontiac prison, conditions in solitary were often explicitly racist — correctional officers frequently taunted our clients with racial slurs. The administration must right this racist wrong by freeing our clients from the extended prison sentences they endure as a result of their time in solitary.”

### **About Illinois Prison Project**

The Illinois Prison Project fights for people serving unjust, unnecessary and excessive sentences in Illinois through advocacy, public education and direct representation of thousands of needlessly incarcerated people. In two years, IPP has freed 60 people, sparing our clients more than 600 years behind bars and saving taxpayers more than \$55 million.

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