



## **ENSURING HUMANE CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT IN NEW YORK STATE PRISONS**

### ***Summary***

Under the unprecedented February 2014 agreement between the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) and New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), the state agreed to immediately begin to remove pregnant and mentally disabled prisoners from segregation. Unfortunately, there continues to be a significant use of solitary confinement in the state's prison system. This practice is in need of immediate and further reforms.

### ***Conference Position***

The Council of Catholic Charities Directors supports efforts to ensure that disciplinary options within the correctional system are designed in a way that respects the dignity of the human person, guarantees access to religious counsel and worship and ensures no further harm will come to the disciplined individual. More specifically, the Council supports legislation sponsored in the Assembly and Senate to restructure the use of segregated confinement and creating alternative therapeutic and rehabilitative confinement systems. The legislation is known as the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act.

### ***Rationale***

This bill would: limit the time an inmate can spend in segregated confinement, end the segregated confinement of vulnerable people, restrict the criteria that can result in such confinement, improve conditions of confinement, and create more humane and effective alternatives to such confinement.

Solitary and other forms of isolated confinement are inhumane, counterproductive, and unsafe. People in isolated confinement in New York State spend 22 to 24 hours a day locked in a cell the size of an elevator. Isolated confinement fails to address the underlying causes of problematic behavior, and often exacerbates that behavior as people deteriorate psychologically, physically, and socially.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture has denounced solitary confinement that exceeds 15 days. Additionally, there are far too many people in isolation, disproportionately people of color. On any given day, about 4,000 men, women, and children are in isolated confinement in New York State prisons. Even particularly vulnerable people are held in isolated confinement. Minors or people with mental illness are disproportionately likely to be placed in isolation. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the NYS Catholic Conference have long called for ending torture and has campaigned against solitary confinement.