

Former U.S. Prisoner Calls Solitary Confinement Torture



Washington, February 28 (RHC)-- The use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons was under discussion on Capitol Hill this week. Witnesses at a hearing led by Illinois Democratic Senator Dick Durbin described how solitary confinement devastates families, allows guards to isolate prisoners whom they have sexually assaulted, and drives prisoners to hopelessness.

Senator Durbin said more than half of prison suicides take place in solitary. Among the speakers was Damon Thibodeaux, a former Louisiana death-row prisoner who spent 15 years in solitary confinement, for 23 hours a day, before being exonerated in 2012.

Damon Thibodeaux told lawmakers: "I do not condone what those who have killed and committed other serious offenses have done, but I also don't condone what we do to them by putting them in solitary confinement for years on end, and treat them as subhuman. We are better than that. As a civilized society, we should be better than that. I would like to think the vast majority of people in America would be appalled if they knew what we are doing to inmates in solitary and understood that we are torturing them, for reasons that have little to do with protecting other inmates or prison guards from them."

Last week, New York state agreed to reform its use of solitary confinement, including banning its use in disciplining prisoners under 18.

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