



Testimony in support of Solitary Confinement

to the January 5, 2022 joint budget hearing of the State Senate Finance and House of Delegates Appropriations Committees

Good afternoon. I am the Northern Virginia Director of Government and Community Relations for the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington. The JCRC is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community representing over 100 synagogues, schools and institutions throughout our region. Since its inception in 1938, the JCRC has championed the cause of civil and human rights on the local, state and national levels. Our work, the policies we have resolved to promote, and our advocacy is grounded in core values of the Jewish faith: Justice, repentance, and the preservation of human life (Exodus 20:13). It is from this perspective that we are part of the Virginia Coalition on Solitary Confinement. I am here today to testify about legislation to limit the use of solitary confinement and the value of incurring any costs of curtailing this harmful practice.

It should go without saying that ending what amounts to torture is worth the cost of doing so. Yet, despite clear statements that fifteen days of isolation is torture and causes long term harm to a prisoner's

mental and physical health, such isolations inexplicably still occur in the Virginia State Prison System with minimal restriction and oversight. Isolation has been used to the extreme injury of inmates - and those from minority and impoverished communities are particularly at risk. Correctional authorities must manage behavior without resorting to this costly, damaging and discriminatory practice.

JCRC believes that conditions of confinement must be humane and that certain conditions, including the overuse of solitary confinement, can impose dire consequences more egregious than the sentences themselves. Further, lack of adequate rehabilitation programming, medical and mental health services, educational opportunities, and family contact tragically result in individuals who too often are unprepared for productive participation in society upon release. These are the true costs of solitary confinement, and while harder to measure in absolute dollars, we all pay the price.

Our ask is simple – when you receive the estimated costs related to legislation limiting the use of solitary confinement, we ask that you include those costs in the Commonwealth's Budget. Failure to do so is acquiescing to the commission of torture by the Commonwealth's authority.

Thank you for your work and thank you for the time to speak to you today.