

NJPC WATCHMEN - A COMMUNITY TALK

July 7th Edition

After being denied access to a visit for almost 2 ½ years, New Jersey Parents Caucus member Mae recently saw her son, James. Even though James suffers from multiple mental health disabilities including psychosis, he was placed in solitary confinement. James is now 22 and was incarcerated in the NJ adult prison system at the age of 17. Mae reached out to us for advocacy support concerning the horrific situation her son is in currently.

James was placed in the foster care system at a very young age where he dealt with abuse from his foster family. James was then adopted by Mae and her husband at the age of 4. James suffers from childhood trauma induced PTSD, ADHD and ODD. James was placed in solitary confinement where his mental and physical health continues to deteriorate.

James's mom describes him as typically being "jovial" and "happy go lucky." However, she is very concerned about his current mental state since she saw it significantly decline during her last visit several weeks ago. James told his mom that solitary confinement makes him "unable to think or remember basic things such as his own name." James has also been struggling with psychosis and has been asking unusual questions such as if he is married has any children, which he does not. Solitary confinement is inhumane treatment that can foster new or exacerbated psychological trauma, psychiatric disorders, or serious, long-term damage to an isolated person's brain. Solitary confinement causes unimaginable stress, hallucinations, anxiety and paranoia, and young people have fewer psychological resources than adults to deal with these conditions.

In 2019 New Jersey passed the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act (P.L. 2019), which was created to restrict the use of solitary confinement in correctional facilities. P.L. 2019 prohibits:

1. The use of solitary confinement unless there is reasonable cause to believe the inmate or others are at substantial risk of serious harm as evidenced by recent threats or conduct, and less restrictive intervention would be insufficient to reduce the risk.
2. Individuals who are under the age of 21, over the age of 65, individuals with disabilities, pregnant women, and LGBTQ individuals from being placed in isolated confinement except in rare, specified circumstances.
3. Inmates from being placed in solitary confinement for more than 20 consecutive days, or for more than 30 days during any 60-day period.

James's case is only one example, out of hundreds, of this law being broken; about two in five incarcerated individuals have mental health issues. James has multiple mental disabilities and deals with inhumane living conditions of being locked in a room for up to 23 ½ hours a day. These rooms are falling apart with mice and bugs everywhere and inmates are denied access to showers for weeks at a time.

In order to help hold the Department of Corrections accountable for these injustices, sign the New Jersey Parents' Caucus' petition [here](#)



