

NM center on law and poverty



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 31, 2013

Contact: Gail Evans, NM Center on Law and Poverty (505) 255-2840
Steven Robert Allen, ACLU-NM (505) 610-4790

New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty and ACLU-NM Release Report on Overuse of Solitary Confinement

Up to 16% of incarcerated New Mexicans are in solitary confinement. It is an overused, underreported practice in our state.

Albuquerque, NM – The New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty (NMCLP) and the ACLU of New Mexico (ACLU-NM) have released a report, **“Inside The Box: The Real Costs of Solitary Confinement in New Mexico’s Prisons and Jails,”** detailing the findings of a year-long investigation of the use of solitary confinement in New Mexico’s prisons and jails. Their study found that solitary confinement is widely used in prisons and jails in New Mexico. While it costs more money to detain prisoners in isolation than in the general population, it does not improve public safety or reduce prison violence. Furthermore, solitary confinement as currently practiced in New Mexico infringes on fundamental rights by isolating prisoners with serious mental illness and allowing for prolonged periods of isolation. The use of this procedure in New Mexico also lacks adequate transparency at both the state and local level.

“Holding people for months in solitary confinement is contrary to any notion of rehabilitation or re-integration,” said Gail Evans, Legal Director of the NM Center on Law and Poverty. “The evidence is clear that isolation results in cognitive deterioration, which can be irreversible, meaning that our prisons and jails are inflicting brain damage on our citizens.”

Solitary confinement means detaining a prisoner in 23-hour-a-day lockdown in small cells, where the person is banned from most out-of-cell activities and social interaction. The investigation found that both state prisons and county jails hold hundreds people in solitary at any one time around the state. The average length of stay of solitary in the prisons is almost 3 years. In the jails, it can last for months, or even years at a time.

New Mexico urgently needs to reform the practice of solitary confinement in its prisons and jails. The NMCLP and the ACLU-NM urge New Mexico to adopt the following reforms:

1. Increase transparency and oversight of the use of solitary confinement
2. Limit the length of solitary confinement to no more than 30 days
3. Mandate that all prisoners be provided with mental, physical and social stimulation

4. Ban the use of solitary confinement on the mentally ill
5. Ban the use of solitary confinement on children

"The amount of information we were able to gather is dwarfed by the amount of information we still lack," said Steven Robert Allen, Director of Public Policy at the ACLU of New Mexico. "New Mexico desperately needs to implement uniform transparency requirements to fully reveal how and why solitary confinement is being used in our prisons and jails."

Find a copy of the report here: http://nmpovertylaw.org/WP-nmclp/wordpress/WP-nmclp/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Solitary_Confinement_Report_FINALsmallpdf.com_.pdf

###