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United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Reassessing Solitary Confinement II: The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

Dear Committee Members:

I am an attorney who represents Mr. Jerry Williams, a 58-year-old schizophrenic, developmentally disabled man who has spent over eight years in solitary confinement in North Carolina state prisons. He suffers from auditory and visual hallucinations, has low literacy, an IQ of 76, and is medicated with a heavy daily dose of Seroquel. All of his convictions are for misdemeanors and low-level felonies—property crimes and minor physical altercations with law enforcement officials.

By operation of North Carolina’s Habitual Felon law, Jerry is serving a 28-year term in prison. And, because he is constantly receiving disciplinary infractions for misbehavior that is directly related to the symptoms of his mental illness, he remains in solitary confinement year after year. Any psychological professional would be unsurprised to hear that a schizophrenic patient, locked within a small, dim, concrete box, might resort to shouting, using profane language, banging on the cell door, or throwing food and liquid. Yet, when Jerry does so, he is consistently disciplined with yet new extended terms of solitary confinement.

For over 70,000 hours, Jerry has been tortured by this treatment, and has been punished for suffering from a serious mental illness.

The following is the testimony of Mr. Jerry Williams for the Senate Judiciary Committee—in Question/Answer format due to his limited written literacy.

* * *

Question: What does it feel like to be locked inside a cell on Unit One [the solitary confinement unit at Central Prison in Raleigh, North

Carolina]?

Answer: The first time you get locked up, it about drive you wild. You want to do anything to get out, even kill yourself.

Question: And how long have you been in segregation now?

Answer: Eight years. . . .

Question: What do you do all day in the cell?

Answer: Best thing I know to do walk back and forth on the floor, pace the floor.

Question: Can you walk me through a day of what you do in your cell?

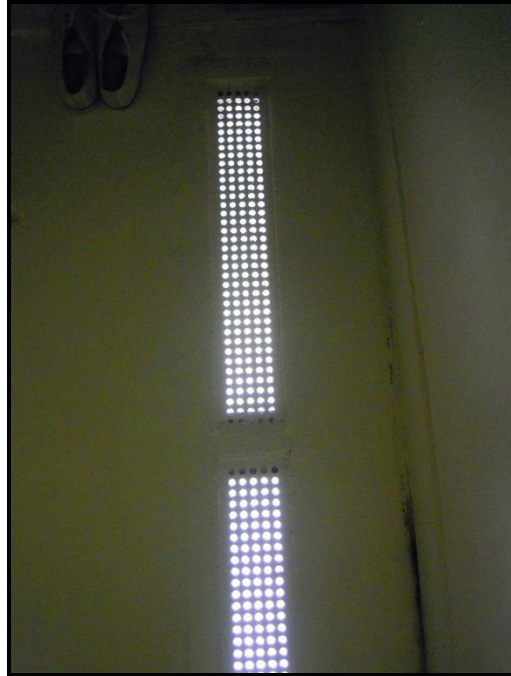
Answer: I used to pray at first, but I stopped praying first, and now I clean up first. Then I pray. And then after I clean up –it might take me an hour, two hours to clean up like I supposed to. Then I clean myself, then I pray. That’s maybe three hours gone.

Then I just walk back and forth the floor. I might walk back and forth the floor sometimes two hours, four hours. Be time to eat. I get my meal and good to go. And then wait for the next one.

I clean up some more ‘cause I be made a mess dropping crumbs and juices eating, so I go clean it up some more, looking out the window. And it’s time to eat again. That’s all you look forward to, the eating. That’s one of the main things, time to eat.

Question: Can you see out the window?

Answer: No, not really. No.



The window in Jerry's cell

Question: You said you look forward to eating. Is the food good?

Answer: Food ain't fit to eat, you don't want to eat it. They don't fix it like it supposed to. . . . The food just get worser and worser.

Anything they used to give you that you like, they take it away. You can't get it no more. . . . Just anything you like, they take it away from you. I don't care what it is. Smoking. Don't get that no more. . . . They give you something else, and they're taking them away now. So everything you like, you're going to lose it. There don't be nothing you like.

Question: Are you able to eat the food anyway, even though you don't like it?

Answer: You lose your appetite, and you might not eat. You might die or—you know, or get real sick [if] you ain't eat. So, you have to go on and eat it anyway, keep right on eating because you know you have to have an appetite. I try to eat anything they put on my plate.

Lately the worse it get—whole lot of stuff I can't eat. I ain't got no teeth. My gums be hurting.

Whole lot of stuff I can't eat. I have to throw it away or throw it on the floor. It makes me so mad sometimes the stuff they give you to

eat. I throw it on the floor and don't even be realizing what I had done, just be snatched the plate, throw it on the floor.

Then I be shocked then. I be wondering if I hurt somebody. I could have hurt somebody, could have got it on somebody. But I try to figure out how I responded that fast with anger and didn't even think that—I won't thinking I'm fixing to do this; I just did it. And I know I supposed to do better than that, 'cause you won't get nothing to eat if they write you up for doing that. You'll go seven days without nothing to eat.

Question: When you say that—about going without food—are you talking about being restricted to Nutraloaf?

Answer: Yeah, I won't eat no Nutraloaf. I won't never eat it. They kept me on Nutraloaf for twenty-one days one time. I didn't never eat it. I started drinking some water. That's all I would drink, water.

Question: Have you lost weight since you've been on segregation?

Answer: Yes, ma'am.

Question: How much did you weigh before you came in in 2001?

Answer: I weighed two hundred and forty-nine.

Question: How much do you weight now?

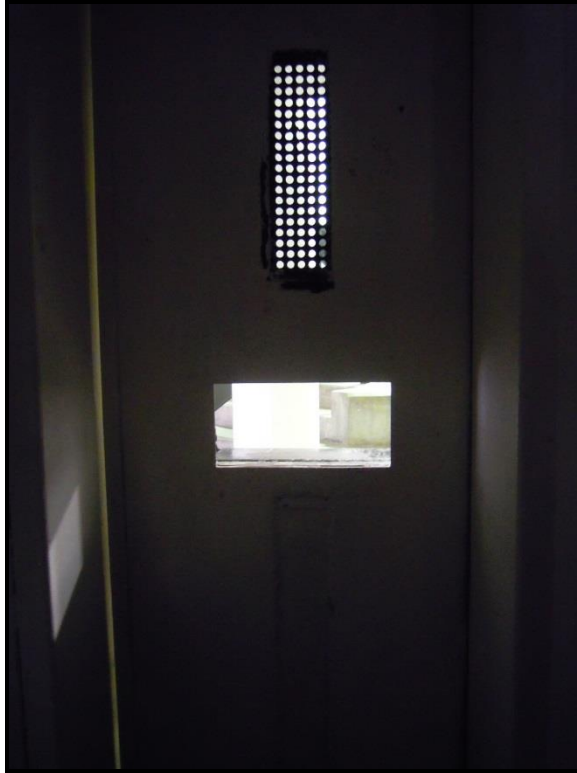
Answer: About a hundred fifty, maybe a hundred and fifty-nine last time I weighed.

Question: Why do you think you lost so much weight?

Answer: Got nothing to eat I guess, not enough food. They used to give me a snack. They took that away too. Can't get them no more. I be writing grievance and stuff trying to see why they won't let me get a snack back. Certain inmates get a double portion. Get two trays then a snack. Some officers give me some extra—extra tray.

Question: Why?

Answer: They do it if they like you or if you do like they tell you. They'll look out for your and give you an extra tray. Sometimes they cancel your rec and your shower. They might give you an extra tray.



The view of Jerry's cell door from the interior of the cell

Question: Do you think you'll ever get off lock-up [solitary confinement]?

Answer: I've got to go from this coming August to February without a write-up [disciplinary infraction], and they might take me off.

Question: Do you think you'll make it?

Answer: If I can stop getting write-ups, I believe I can make it. But I just [have to] stop having to kick on the door or keep calling and begging for them to come and see me and talk to me. I've got to leave all that alone. That's the only way to get off lock-up. You don't bother no staff or inmates. You just stay quiet, don't be asking nobody for nothing. Don't never even hear you talk.

Question: Can you describe what it feels like when you get sprayed with pepper spray?

Answer: It's a terrible feeling, but it ain't nothing like it was the first—first time I got sprayed. You feel blind. You ain't going to be able to see no more. And it burns real bad. Burns like you're on fire. And your eye has—just got used to it. You go in, they talking about you're going to let them wash it off from out of your face. That's when the officers beat you—got to beating you and 'bout

beat you to death. So I tell them I don't want them—whatever they call that word [decontamination]. I say, "No, no I'm all right." I wait till I can get to my room and get my rag and wipe it off. So it burns.

Questions: What are the symptoms of your schizophrenia?

Answer: Most of the time I get paranoid, thinking somebody is going to hurt you. Be by yourself and want to hide sometimes. Sometimes—sometimes you don't want nobody to look at you.

Question: Why do you feel that way?

Answer: That's paranoid. That's what it do. That's how it's been. I don't know how I got like that. I just get paranoid, think—sometimes you might think everybody wanting to hurt you or somebody wanting to kill you or somebody don't like you. Just—I call it paranoid. You want to be by yourself and hide, be somewhere where nobody don't know where you're at, just hide.

Question: Do you hear any voices?

Answer: Sometimes. Sometimes I be trying to figure out what it's saying. I don't understand exactly what they be saying. Sometimes they're calm voices. Sometimes I even hear angry voices, be cursing and screaming.

Be making you feel bad, making you want to do things, make yourself want to kill yourself sometimes.

Question: What does that feel like?

Answer: Like nobody don't care nothing about you, not even God. You live all by yourself and get worser than what you're getting, or deserve worser than what you're getting. And that's—stuff like that sometimes makes me cry. Not supposed to do that. Don't nobody care nothing about you, your people, your family, nobody. Don't nobody like you. And I know it's the truth.

Question: Do you see things that other people don't see?

Answer: I seen a snake in my cell. I know there was a snake in there because I seen snake slime and where he'd been laying in the floor. I swear I'm seeing it. And I dozed off to sleep around about one o'clock. And about an hour into my sleep or an hour and a half, something was burning my head. I know something was biting

me.

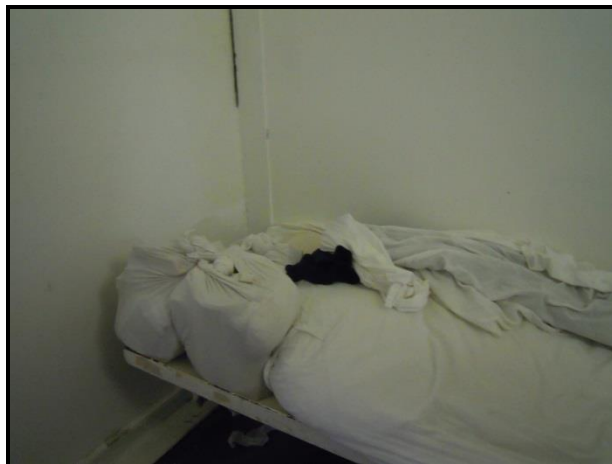
And I woke up, and I went to beating my head, hitting my head with my hands. And it still was hurting. And I grabbed my shower shoes and went to beating my head. And it got off—whatever it was got off me slow. The room—it had a crack right beside the wall. And I looked and seen spider webs. And I said “That darn snake. That’s where that son of a gun is.” So I went and got the newspaper, then went to sticking the newspaper down in there, went to scratching that newspaper and putting big holes in that newspaper. So I know that was a snake had bit me.

Question: Do you talk to yourself a lot?

Answer: Yeah, since I been locked up [on solitary confinement], a whole lot. Can’t hardly stop doing that. Hard to stop when there’s nothing else to do. You’d rather do that, just talk to yourself. The longer you stay locked up, the longer you do it. I can’t hardly stop sometimes now if I talk to myself. Got to have something to do. Read, write, clean up, do something to keep from talking to myself.

Question: What do you talk about?

Answer: About everything you ever imagine, everything you done did, where you went wrong, things you did wrong or some things you did crazy, laugh about it. You be talking about it. I ain’t the only one. A lot of mental health patients do. I just get worser since I been locked up [on solitary confinement]. Sometimes I just—I think that was a good way to pass time, just talking and laughing about a whole lot of crazy things you did. And then, you know, it gets worser and worser.



Jerry's bed

Question: Why do you think you've gotten worse since you've been on lock-up [solitary confinement]?

Answer: 'Cause I—I might talk two or three minutes to myself and check myself and stop. But now, shoot, I might talk to myself four hours, eight hours. That and talking—walking around and talking to myself.

I heard somebody was going to kill me I think. I heard voices of inmates, someone saying "I'm going to kill you. They're going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you." Get scared like that. That's when I got to barricading my door.

[The voices] tell you you're the devil, going to kill you or you're the devil.

Question: Is there anything else you want to say?

Answer: I hope to start over for the better—with the help of the Lord Jesus, you, and family. I do hope that I be good and get off lock-up [solitary confinement].

* * *

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth G. Simpson
Attorney
North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services