

## **Statement of Ira Alston (Inmate # 275666) in Support of HB 7302, An Act Concerning Isolated Confinement and Correctional Staff Training and Wellness**

It should be well understood and therefore undisputed that to operate, manage and maintain a facility such as Northern Correctional Institution (“NCI”) is extremely costly to the taxpayers of Connecticut. With this backdrop in full perspective one should pause to contemplate whether these financial costs outweigh the benefit put forward by DOC administrators, lobbyists, union representatives, representatives, supporters, and others who support the segregation and lock-down of human beings within “extreme isolative facilities” such as NCI. DOC advocates will promote that NCI houses only the worst of the worst, the most deserving within the prison population, the violent, aggressive, assaultive and disruptive, recalcitrant inmates among the general inmate population. That such isolation or segregation is necessary to provide a safe, secure and orderly prison management.

With their fancy rhetoric regarding the “need for an institution like NCI”, the DOC will have one believe that the inmates that are housed at NCI are the El Chapos, Bin Ladens, and the Husseins within the prison walls of Connecticut. Even a casual overview of the inmate population at NCI will lead to a contrary conclusion. Which continuously begs the question: “Is the financial cost worth its purported benefits put forward to justify its maintenance?” NCI has housed and continues to house the Bugs Bunnies, Tweety Birds, and Mickey Mouses among the inmate population within Connecticut’s correctional system, including the severely mentally unstable and vulnerable. This isn’t to disparage any inmates who have been and continue to be housed at NCI. It is safe to say that NCI has morphed into a playpen for the harmless while DOC advocates continue to promote that these inmates are “dangerous” even when the evidence calls for a contrary conclusion. If one were to find a dangerous inmate at NCI, it is because NCI’s conditions, abusive practices, indifferent regimen and isolative confinement has manufactured that which it now seems to want to control.

This is not hearsay or fanciful talk. I am not a casual observer. I am not someone on the outside looking in. I personally witnessed and even befriended some of the inmates the DOC and NCI officials have labeled dangerous, the “worst of the worst,” or a threat -- I myself am considered to be one of those inmates even though I am no longer at NCI -- to justify their long-term stay at NCI. And these human beings had a conscience, aspirations, and goals. Talent and dignity and pride. But after years of being isolated, bullied, abused, degraded while at NCI they have been robbed of those qualities we call human. Their ability to think rationally has deteriorated into oblivion along with their social relationships, the very anchor that once held them together. An end result is the feeling of utter loneliness. A feeling that the world hates and despises you. For some, this feeling manifests itself into attitudes of “I hate and despise the world”— an attitude doomed for destructive behavior! For many others, this feeling of utter loneliness has manifested itself into the believe that “I am not wanted,” a belief that sets fertile ground for suicide. Is the financial cost worth the human carnage? If on occasion one finds an inmate housed at NCI for a serious incident by no means is that incident typical or commonplace. Those incidents by prison records are labeled “isolated.”

These inmates can and should be disciplined by other readily available alternatives versus long-term isolation with all its ills and perils. I was housed at NCI from June 2000 to March 2003 as a pretrial detainee and returned to NCI from September 2003 to February 2013, then

again from January 2015 to May 2016 -- all during this one continuous term of incarceration. By no stretch of the imagination, without exaggeration, the financial cost is not worth the human cost. NCI has outlived its purpose. Thank you all for listening. God bless you and may you have a good day or evening or night!

-Ira Alston