

Hello, my name is Lisa Kessler-Peters. I am a Mother of 3, a Wife, an Author, a Pastor, a Program Manager of Unsheltered Services in Harrisburg, PA; and I also am a person that has been in solitary confinement. I obtained degrees in Criminal Justice and Psychology (Applied Behavioral Analysis) after high school but had never dealt with the trauma of my own childhood. As a result, when life showed up in my late 20s, a combination of a divorce, a TBI (traumatic brain injury), mental health and substance use disorder (that started from prescribed medications) led to my incarceration in 2014. I never thought I would be in jail in a million years, and I was devastated by the reality I was faced with. I was deemed suicidal during booking which was a valid observation. Instead of any form of intervention, I was put into solitary confinement. No counselor or professional came and spoke with me. No treatment of any form was provided. When I would hyperventilate from my panic attacks or start crying uncontrollable, I was told to shut the F\*\*\* up. When I asked for my mental health medications, I was laughed at and told I would not be receiving any of that in here. Benzodiazepines (Klonopin and Ativan) were medications I was on for over 13 years, and you can die from withdrawal of.

I was kept in a 6x9x12 with the lights on 24 hours a day. They called it a "strip cell" but it is the same thing as solitary confinement. In county jails, sometimes they are referred to as "the hole", protective custody, medical, or strip cell. It is all the same thing. You are isolated without any connections to others. It actually will cause a sound minded person to have a psychotic episode. And for someone that is not doing well, it will make them worse-not better. I was not given a clean uniform or undergarments, hygiene products such as a toothbrush, toothpaste or deodorant and went over 10 days without a shower. I had to pretend to "be better" to get out. I essentially had to lie and say that I was no longer suicidal in order to get out. This is one of the reasons I think the suicide rate in prison is high.

I never felt so dehumanized. I am permanently scarred from how I was treated during that time. I went into jail wanting to die, but how I was treated once the prison staff knew I wanted to die made me realize that no one even cares if I do die. I felt my life had no value and that indeed I should take my life. It is only because of God's mercy and grace on my life that I am here today because I had ever intent on dying in that cell.

Individuals come out of solitary confinement in worse shape then they go in and then are told to "do better", "be better". The damage caused is sometimes unrepairable. Our prisons are filled with a lot of people with PTSD and incarceration within itself is a traumatic event. The short- and long-term effects include chronic health issues and mental health issues. It puts even more strain on the prison system and the government to deal with these individuals' failing health.

I work with the unhoused population right here where the Capitol is. As you can see just from driving down Front Street that the homeless population just keeps growing. A lot of these folks have been impacted by our criminal justice system and suffer with mental health varying in degrees. And sometimes they just don't even want to be inside anymore. It feels safer to be outside. I personally had crippling anxiety after being in solitary. I would jump at the smallest noises or movements. Clanking sounds like metal on metal were the worst. I always had to be near a door in a room. I avoid all small spaces including elevators and will gladly take the steps no matter how many floors. I still struggle with being touched, even by my children and husband. I don't trust people and avoid building relationships because people seem so unsafe. I also get overstimulated easily. These are things I did not have prior to being incarcerated. AND IT HAS BEEN 9 YEARS, 10 MONTHS AND 26 DAYS SINCE I WAS IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

Solitary is mostly used to deal with things the jail/prison doesn't want to deal with or doesn't know how to deal with but at what cost?! Solitary for violent offenders is more the exception than the rule. And even in those situations, if you put an angry dog in a cage for long periods of time without any contact with humans, what would happen when you let him out? You are going to have an even more aggressive animal. People typically become violent when they feel threatened, or they feel like that have to show superiority over others for their own safety.

Rehabilitation, treatment programs and restorative justice practices need to replace solitary confinement. People can be held accountable without being tortured. If people are taught how to be better, then they can indeed do better.

The impact on me by solitary confinement won't allow me to stay silent on this matter. And as much as I wish I could forget this ever happened to me; I have to keep fighting for the 80,000 people that are in solitary confinement on any given day in Pennsylvania. I feel their suffering to my core, and I must speak for those that can't speak for themselves. Please help us change this. All human life matters.