

Dear members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to express my comments via means of having this letter read to your committee. I am the father of fallen Federal Officer Eric Williams and President of Voices of JOE, a law enforcement advocacy group incorporated in the state of Pennsylvania.

On the evening of February 25, 2013, my son Eric was locking down the inmates in a high security housing unit at USP Canaan, near Waymart, Pa. when he was brutally attacked and murdered by an inmate. Eric was alone and unarmed, was stabbed over 200 times, and remained undiscovered for twenty minutes after the eight-minute attack ended. The inmate who murdered Eric was a New Mexican Mafia gang member who was doing life for another murder. His punishment for murdering Eric was to have another life sentence on top of the one he had.

Our family later learned that this inmate had committed several infractions that should have resulted in placement in the Special Housing Unit, the Federal Systems behavioral management unit which is essentially the same as the State's Restrictive Housing Unit. However, instead of being in the Special Housing Unit, this inmate was left available to obtain his weapons, organize his ambush, and murder my son. We learned that he had been given some type of hearing at which time, although he should have been placed in the SHU, he was given another pass. Naturally, our family was never given any kind of acceptable explanation for this. We do know that this was a time when there was some pressure being put on legislators to do away with special housing. There was also concern inside the administration of the Federal Bureau of Prisons around that time as to how much it cost to keep an inmate in the SHU.

As Eric was working alone in an understaffed penitentiary and his killer was kept out of the SHU, it certainly seems to our family that our 34-year-old son's life was expendable on the altar of saving money. As to the inmate who did this, it certainly appears that he has avoided real consequences for his actions by avoiding placement in the SHU as well as being given a life sentence for killing Eric when he was already serving one. There was neither accountability nor justice here.

My organization, Voices of JOE, has worked tightly with Federal and State Correctional Officers unions, with most Voices of JOE's members themselves being corrections officers. And all of us believe that Restrictive Housing plays an effective role in preventing violence and victimization and serves as a deterrent for future misconduct. Those inmates whose violent behavior rises to the level that it becomes a threat to the safety of other inmates and staff requires the kind of supervision that goes beyond just

giving out summary consequences. Individuals prone to violence obviously require special management and cannot be left to act out in an open setting. The general setting inside a prison is already inherently a dangerous environment. Statistics demonstrate that without question. To allow violent offences to occur inside the walls without the ability to restrict these individuals and manage them separately only lends itself to exacerbating that already dangerous environment.

In my own career, I was the Vice President of an inpatient residential treatment center for drug addicted adolescents. Most of my patients were also criminal offenders and were court ordered into treatment. There were many of these patients, who, when given the opportunity to change, were able to take advantage of the treatment offered. However, there were many of these adolescents who were already "hard wired" in their criminal thinking and behavior and had already established patterns of rejecting society's rules. These were the people who always saw kindness as a weakness, were prepared to take advantage of kindness wherever possible. Their relationships with others were always power oriented. They intimidate, threaten, and create an undercurrent preventing those who want to do the right thing from doing so. These individuals are manageable only through having tight boundaries and strong accountability and consequences for their behavior.

Programs like Restrictive Housing Units (state) or Special Housing Units are considered Best Practices which are supported by decades of clinical studies and empirical data. These are part of a fair and effective institutional management system and should not be confused with what the media loves to call "solitary confinement."

Because of what happened to my son, Officer Eric Williams, I urge this committee to place a priority on the safety of the employees of these prisons and the vulnerable inmate who deserves to be protected from these violent individuals who would not hesitate to do them harm. It is my firm belief that management tools such as Restrictive House Units, properly utilized and managed, are a necessary part of keeping staff and inmates safe. Thank you.

**Don Williams
President, Voices of JOE
Officer Eric Williams' father**