



## Press Release

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Date: Thursday, December 10th, 2020, 9:00 - 10:30 am (EST)

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### **Stop Solitary CT Discusses the PROTECT Act with Panel of Experts during Virtual Legislative Breakfast, Breakfast Attended by Dozens of Community Members and at least 10 Legislators.**

Hartford, CT – During a virtual legislative breakfast on Human Rights Day, panelists described the importance of the PROTECT Act, legislation designed to abolish solitary confinement. Leighton Johnson, a Stop Solitary CT steering committee member framed the discussion, describing his own experience with the horrors of solitary at Northern C.I, Connecticut’s supermax prison.

Next Melvin Medina, the Policy Director at the ACLU of CT, discussed the history of Northern. Melvin argued that “Northern C.I. is a brutal experience in both design and in its practices.” He said, “It should be shut down and reduced to rubble. Any practices that have evolved from Northern and spread across the DOC system are in immediate need of oversight, review, and should be abolished. Connecticut needs the PROTECT Act”

Speaking after Melvin, Rahisha Bivens, a Stop Solitary CT steering committee member, described her experience advocating for her brother who was subjected to solitary confinement while in the custody of the DOC. She noted that many people in general population are still in their cell for over 21 hours a day, a form of isolation that would be eliminated by the PROTECT Act.

Focusing on the clinical harms of solitary, Dr. Ben Howell, faculty at Yale School of Medicine and the SEICHE center, described the medical literature on prolonged isolation. He said, "Solitary confinement, no matter what you call it, causes irreparable harm. Solitary is associated with increased psychological harm and can occur even within a short time in solitary."

Other speakers, included: Stop Solitary CT Steering committee member Kevnesha Boyd, who reflected on the horrors she experienced while working in the Connecticut Department of Correction; Stop Solitary CT Steering committee member James Tillman, who reflected on the harms of extreme isolation he experienced while wrongfully incarcerated; and the Executive Director of the Schell Center at Yale Law School Hope Metcalf, who spoke about the lack of oversight and transparency in the Connecticut Department of Correction and the solutions proposed in the PROTECT Act.

**Dozens of community members attended the event and approximately 10 legislatures joined as well.** Some of the legislators in attendance were Senator Gary Winfield, Rep. Mark Anderson, Rep. Quentin Phipps, Rep. David Michel, Rep. Robyn Porter, Rep. Anthony Nolan, Rep. Josh Elliot, Rep. Anne Hughes, Rep. Tammy Nuccio, and Rep. Edwin Vargas.

Reflecting on the event, Representative David Michel said, “In light of these dire times, we legislators, more than ever, need to respect our oath to serve, but also to protect our constituents.

Banning this useless atrocious practice from a continuing oppressive system, will protect some of our most vulnerable people in our state from being subjected to torture”

Rep. Anne Hughes, Co-chair of the Progressive Democratic Caucus said, “We can’t be ‘The Constitution State’ and normalize state-sanctioned torture and lack of oversight any longer. It’s time to choose, Connecticut, which will we be? I urge my colleagues in the 2021 Legislature to join us to pass the Protect Act and finally BE the Constitution state for all of the CT community, including our incarcerated neighbors, and further make good on our pledge by closing Northern!”

Rep. Quentin Phipps said, “After spending time in Stop Solitary’s Replica Cell last spring, I was unequivocally convinced that solitary is a form of torture that has no place in the State of Connecticut. Today’s virtual legislative breakfast demonstrated the horrors of solitary yet again. I am in full support of the PROTECT Act.”

You can find a recording of the virtual legislative breakfast on our Website, Twitter or Facebook. You can also find it linked [here](#).

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