

My name is Marco Barrios a member and leader of JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA). As a formerly incarcerated individual, throughout my 24 years and 6 months, I am fortunate to say that I never endured the horror and trauma of solitary confinement. The ability of staying away from this inhumane practice by D.O.C. had to do with a combination of luck, avoiding self-destructive activities, and utilizing my time for growth and healing, with the help of God. Members of the Board, what I want to share with you is simply my lived experiences in correctional facilities and the witnessing of individuals going to solitary confinement and its effects.

During my incarceration, many of the individuals I witnessed going to the Box had either mental health issues, drug addiction or both. Some did have behavioral health issues however what I find hard to believe is the inconceivable notion that the usage of solitary confinement kept people safe, deters individuals from committing misbehaviors, or in any way addresses the issues that caused their behavior.

Often, what I witnessed when there were physical altercations, the individuals that went to the box and came out, were much more bitter and mentally unstable. At times, even more violent. This certainly did not make me feel more safer and I wondered if the correctional staff felt the same. The fact that certain individuals kept going to the box convinced me that this was the wrong way of going about making people in the facility safer, correcting someone's behavior and certainly treating individuals as human beings.

As you are all aware there are numerous articles and reports about solitary confinement. All of them (well the ones I read) share the damaging effects of spending time in solitary confinement, and just as important there are blueprints on alternatives to such practices – including the Blueprint to End Solitary Confinement that the Jails Action Coalition developed. Now, I know it is difficult to make changes in a system that has been in place for such a long time. But it is time to get rid of a type of punishment that is "cruel, inhumane, and counterproductive".

And, make no mistake even if the Board considers shortening the length of time a person has to do in solitary confinement it only keeps in place an ineffective Jail based punishment, instead of going in a different direction as many states has done. Now, this is an important historical moment such as we have seen by NYC's commitment to close Rikers Island, shrink the jail system to four borough-based facilities, and build communities. And, as a proud member of the programming subcommittee for the Mayor's office of criminal justice task force, I do see promising reform and cultural change in the jails system. Finally, my testimony today is not based on any academic credentials (though I did obtain a bachelor's degree in behavioral Science) but on the sole evidence of my lived experiences in a jail and prison setting. With that said, I hope and pray that this board will decide to embrace the alternative to solitary confinement blueprint outlined by the NYC Jails Action Coalition and HALTsolitary.