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THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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ANTONIO REYNOSO

COUNCIL MEMBER, 34th DISTRICT, BROOKLYN & QUEENS

I want to thank the Board of Corrections for holding this important hearing today and beginning a discussion around the practice of solitary confinement. The BOC has an incredible opportunity to make history on criminal justice reform in the City of New York with this process. Since its inception, the criminal justice system in the United States has been based on vindictiveness and revenge, often crossing the line into cruel and unusual punishment. Furthermore, our system has unjustly targeted people of color throughout its history, making it difficult to assert that there's any justice at all present within the institution. Things are changing though, and while democratic systems often move slowly, when we are talking about people's human rights, it is critical that we act with the necessary level of urgency. Each member of this board has the power to not only move our City forward, but to restore dignity and humanity within our criminal justice system.

We're here today to talk about a proposed rule on the use of solitary confinement by the Department of Corrections. As someone who believes that solitary confinement is torture, I am saddened that we are having a conversation like this. You can't make rules around torture. How can we take any human being and completely cut them off from human contact for any period of time? How can we do this to folks who are dealing with layers of trauma and often suffer from mental illness? We must take a stand on this issue, we must show that New York is a leader on human rights and that we have moved toward a justice system that reflects the values our City represents. Running a jail is not easy and addressing violence within a facility is a complex and fraught task, however, if we are going to deprive people of their liberty, it is our collective responsibility to ensure these individuals are treated with a level of dignity that reflects their status as a human being. This begins with enacting the Blueprint to End Solitary put forth by the Jails Action Coalition and Halt Solitary.

I want to appeal to the members of this Board to do what you know to be right. We must ban solitary confinement once and for all. No rules that we place around the use of torture negates the fact that we are engaging in torture. For once, let us take bold action, let's not take a piecemeal approach to ending a practice that we know to be indefensible. I want to thank the members of the board for their time and I again urge you to seize this historic opportunity and end the practice of solitary confinement in the City of New York once and for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Antonio Reynoso", followed by a horizontal line.

Antonio Reynoso
Council Member, 34th District