

STATEMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS IN THE NEWS CONFERENCE

Morna Murray, Executive Director of DRRI: “DRRI has worked for years to bring these violations to the light of day. Human beings who are seriously mentally ill, and oftentimes incarcerated for actions arising from such illness, are then subjected, for infractions arising from their mental illness, to the deliberately harmful policy of enforced solitary isolation, removal from any regular human contact, in filthy conditions, with little to no access to even fresh air. There is absolutely no remedial value to this practice whatsoever; it is inhumane and unconscionable.”

Amy Fettig, Deputy Director of the ACLU National Prison Project: “All around the country, we’re seeing states turn their back on long-term solitary confinement, which we know amounts to torture and is completely detrimental for the rehabilitation process. This is especially true for patients with mental illness. The overwhelming majority of these people will return to their communities, and the way we treat them in prison has long-lasting implications – not only for their own well-being, but for their families and communities as well. What we’re seeing in Rhode Island is unacceptable and unconstitutional, and we will fight to see them bring their system up to legal and moral standards.”

James Rollins, cooperating attorney for the ACLU-RI and partner at Nelson, Mullins, Riley & Scarborough, LLP: “Nelson Mullins has represented protection and advocacy agencies, like Disability Rights Rhode Island, in many other states, including in cases like this one in Massachusetts and South Carolina. As somebody who has litigated these cases, I am all too aware of the incredible harm that solitary confinement can inflict on individuals, and particularly on those with mental disabilities who often end up receiving this punishment because of their disabilities. I am hopeful that this lawsuit will move Rhode Island forward in eliminating this harsh, inhumane and ultimately counter-productive practice.”

Steven Brown, Executive Director of the ACLU of Rhode Island: “The state’s use of solitary confinement is unconstitutional, plain and simple. Decades of research and experience tell us that it damages people, sometimes irreversibly, especially if they have mental illness. It’s time to stop this cruel practice in Rhode Island.”

Charles Feldman, Deputy Executive Director of The Oasis Wellness & Recovery Centers of RI: “I have seen people convicted of even the most serious crimes go on to become respected and contributing members of society, when they embraced recovery. People with mental illness need support and treatment to recover, and not solitary, which leads to a downward spiral of worsening symptoms and even suicide. The motto of Oasis is: Recovery is Real! We have seen it work, and we see the need to expand it to all those living with major mental illness.”

[NON-PARTICIPANT] Charlene Liberty, plaintiff and ACI inmate: “People who have loved ones with mental health problems incarcerated at the ACI should know that they are sometimes placed in ‘segregation’ or extreme isolation. If someone has a mental illness, I strongly believe it is not right to discipline them by placing them in extreme isolation. As a person with mental illness, I hate to see anyone treated the way I was treated – aggressively thrown into segregation, stripped down, made to feel less than a person and placed in a cell with no one to talk to, waiting for them to tell you what you did and how many days or weeks you are going to be isolated, left alone with your thoughts and emotions making things all that much worse. There is nothing

positive – only feeling less than human, depressed, unworthy, seeing things on the wall, talking to yourself and wanting to kill yourself. My story was a bad one. I am hoping that in the future things will change in the Department of Corrections.”

[NON-PARTICIPANT] Paul Council, DRRI Board member: “Years ago, as a person with a known mental health diagnosis, I had the unfortunate experience of being left helpless at the ACI and placed in isolation as a consequence of my disability. Usually, I do not care to reflect much on this time except that I know that others are experiencing similar or worse fates than me and are in desperate need of our attention. I take pride in knowing that sharing my perspective could help reshape the system that causes such cruel and unusual treatment.”