February 2024

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris,

We, the undersigned civil rights, human rights, faith, and health organizations and leaders, including people who have survived solitary confinement, people who have had family members in solitary confinement, and allies, write to urge you to finally act this year to fulfill your campaign pledge to end solitary confinement in all forms of federal custody. You have the power to end solitary confinement today, and we urge you to act now, before your first term ends, to stop torture, protect people’s basic human rights, improve safety, and save lives.

We were appreciative of both of your campaign pledges to end solitary confinement and your recognition in the President’s May 2022 executive order of the devastating harms of solitary. As you have recognized, solitary confinement is torture. It causes devastating harm and, too often, death. It leads to worse safety outcomes for everyone, including those incarcerated or employed at facilities and the neighbors and communities where survivors of solitary return. At the same time, there is ample evidence that alternative forms of separation are much more effective at both improving safety and protecting people’s health and well-being. Despite this growing body of evidence, over 122,000 people remain in solitary on any given day across the country, and the number of people in solitary in federal custody has remained horrifically high – including over 11,000 people in the federal Bureau of Prisons alone as well as many others in immigration detention and other federal facilities.

Now is the moment to act to end this torturous and counterproductive practice and instead utilize proven alternatives. Now is the moment because people are suffering and dying as we write this letter. Now is also the moment because there is growing support and momentum across the country to end solitary confinement. Polling data shows widespread bipartisan support across the country for ending solitary confinement beyond four hours for emergency de-escalation. State and local jurisdictions throughout the country are taking significant steps toward curtailing or ending solitary confinement. Drawing from those best policies and practices, the U.S. House and Senate have now introduced the End Solitary Confinement Act to end solitary confinement beyond four hours for emergency de-escalation; allow for alternatives that provide access to 14 hours of daily out-of-cell group programming and activities; enhance due process protections, oversight, and the ability of incarcerated people to enforce their rights; and incentivize states and localities to do the same.

We believe the End Solitary Confinement Act is the way forward to stop the torture of solitary confinement, improve safety inside of facilities and in outside communities, and save lives. We urge you to endorse this legislation and work with Congress to enact the End Solitary Confinement Act. We also urge that you take executive action immediately to implement the provisions of the End Solitary Confinement Act in all forms of federal custody, including the ban on solitary confinement beyond four hours for emergency de-escalation, allowance for alternative forms of separation with access to 14 hours of daily out-of-cell group programming and activities, enhancement of due process protections, oversight, and the ability of
incarcerated people to enforce their rights, and incentivization of states and localities to do the same.

As you enter the final year of your first term, you have an opportunity, and a moral obligation, to uphold people’s basic human rights and ensure that all people in U.S. facilities are no longer subject to the torture of solitary confinement. People’s health, safety, and lives are at stake. We urge you to act now to end solitary confinement once and for all.

Sincerely,