

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

May 8, 2019

Dear Senators:

Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. Given the significant risks of using room confinement as a means to control behavior of juveniles in the justice system, we are writing to express our support for LB 230.

As we found in our research on the effects of solitary confinement of adults in the justice system, the practice of solitary confinement is problematic. The preponderance of the literature indicates that solitary confinement is a hazardous practice that has significant negative consequences for inmates' psychological as well as physical well-being. The use of solitary confinement and its consequent psychological and physical damage is not limited to adults. As the Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence reports, "Nowhere is the damaging impact of incarceration on vulnerable children more obvious than when it involves solitary confinement. A 2002 investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice showed that juveniles experience symptoms of paranoia, anxiety, and depression even after very short periods of isolation."¹ Additionally, "Numerous state studies over the years have found that up to two thirds of kids in lockup had diagnosable disorders. And when these kids act up behind bars, locking them in a room alone often exacerbates their condition."² Room confinement presents a higher risk of suicide for juveniles and exacerbates the psychological harms of juveniles with disabilities and those exposed to trauma.³

For these reasons, we urge the legislature to advance LB 230 and AM 450.

Sincerely,

Bradley A. Meurrens, MPA
Public Policy Director
Disability Rights Nebraska

¹ Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, 2012, p. 190, available at <https://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf>

² Liebelson, D. "This Is What Happens When We Lock Children in Solitary Confinement", *Mother Jones*, January/February, 2015, p. 7, available at <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/01/juveniles-kids-solitary-confinement-ohio-new-york/>

³ National Center on Institutions and Alternatives (2004), "Juvenile Suicide in Confinement: A National Survey", p. 28, available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/213691.pdf>