

Testimony regarding the Ombuds' 2025 Conditions of Confinement Report

January 29, 2026

Good evening. My name is Joseph Gaylin. Several years ago, I worked with Stop Solitary CT to pass the PROTECT Act, legislation responsible for reinstating the Office of the Correction Ombuds. It is a pleasure to testify today regarding the Ombud's *2025 Conditions of Confinement Report*.

The myriad forms of institutional neglect documented in the report are alarming. No one should be subjected to showers filled with black mold, extensive delays for basic medical care, and feces-ridden meals. These conditions need to change. They needed to change years ago. For the next couple of minutes, however, I want to focus on a particular finding in the report: the widespread use of lockdowns for non-emergencies. In addition to its present recommendations, there are several other actions the Correction Ombuds should take to restrict the use of lockdowns.

The first is a legislative fix. As you know, the PROTECT Act restricts the use of isolated confinement, which is defined in the act as "any form of confinement within a cell" with less than four to five hours out of cell per day. There is, however, an exception to this otherwise comprehensive definition: facility-wide lockdowns. See Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 18-96B(a)(7). The legislative history suggests that this exception was intended to cover emergencies. Yet, the regularity with which prisons in Connecticut are locked down demonstrates that the exception has swallowed the rule. In light of the findings in its 2025 report, the Office of the Correction Ombuds should advocate for a definition of isolated confinement that includes instances where incarcerated people are locked in their cells due to a facility-wide lock down.

Further, the PROTECT Act requires that the Connecticut Department of Correction submit an annual report to the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division detailing, among other things, "the number of incarcerated people in isolated confinement in [the] state's correctional facilities" See Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 18-96B(i)(2). To date, it does not appear that this data has been made available to the public, or that the Department of Correction is in fact tracking the number of people subjected to isolated confinement in its custody. If it has not already done so, the Correction Ombuds should request all data reported to the CJPPD pursuant to the PROTECT Act and disseminate the information to the public. If no such data exists, the Ombuds should clarify that fact to the public.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for your work to protect people incarcerated in Connecticut state prisons and jails.