



October 20, 2015

The Honorable Cory Booker
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senate Booker:

On behalf of the 123,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing in support of S. 1965, the Maintaining dignity and Eliminating unnecessary Restrictive Confinement of Youths (MERCY) Act of 2015. This important legislation would place restrictions on the use of solitary confinement for juveniles in federal custody, and we are very grateful for your efforts to ensure its inclusion in S. 2123, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprising researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, profession, and means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.

Through this mission, our membership strongly supports efforts to protect the dignity and rights of children and youth, and to foster their positive development. In 1990, APA endorsed the principles and objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In 2001, we urged the United States Senate to ratify the Convention, which requires that children be protected from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment at all times, even when incarcerated. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, tasked with interpreting the CRC, has stated that solitary confinement falls into this category and should be considered cruel and unusual treatment.

Furthermore, APA is committed to the use of psychological science in the development and implementation of sensible social policies. Critical research demonstrates that adolescents are still developing in neurological, cognitive, and emotional domains, and cannot be treated as adults (for details, see APA amicus briefs in [Roper v. Simmons](#) (2005), [Graham v. Florida and Sullivan v. Florida](#) (2010) and [Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs](#) (2012)). Solitary confinement among youth is associated with increased risk of self-mutilation and suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, paranoia, and aggression. Solitary confinement, while also harmful to adult prisoners, can have especially devastating consequences to youth, and should not be used as a means of discipline except in the most extreme, short-term cases.

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In closing, we would like to thank you for your leadership in developing S. 1965 and in gaining its inclusion in S. 2123. If you have any questions, or if our Association can be of assistance in your efforts, please contact Gabriel Twose, Ph.D., in our Government Relations Office (gtwose@apa.org, 202.336.5931). We look forward to working with you to advance human rights both for justice-involved youth and in society at-large.

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Public Interest Directorate