

April 22, 2009

Human Rights Coalition  
Accountability Council for the Defense of Prisoners' Rights and Lives  
5125 Penn Ave Pittsburgh, PA 15224  
[hrcfedup@gmail.com](mailto:hrcfedup@gmail.com) 412-361-3022 xt.4

We come before you today: family members and friends of people in prison, concerned citizens of Pennsylvanian communities, and advocates of human rights. Our goal is to bring to your attention the extreme human rights violations that are taking place in prisons across the state. We want you to recommit yourselves to upholding the laws that already exist. To start this process we request that you visit the prisons and participate in a congressional investigation of the Restricted Housing Units (RHU's, aka the "hole") to hear first hand from the prisoners themselves.

Enclosed in this packet are excerpts from the Abuse Logs that the Human Rights Coalition-FedUp! Chapter has collected over the past year and a half. In its entirety, the Abuse Logs are over 100 pages, summarizing hundreds of incidents of human rights violations in PA prisons. The logs include the destruction of legal property, racial profiling, sensory deprivation and beatings, and others. This documentation has been collected from thousands of pages of prisoner reports, affidavits, declarations, institutional grievances and other documentation, civil litigation dockets, and further corroborated by countless hours of interviews with current and former prisoners and their family and friends on the outside.

These conditions illustrated in the Abuse Logs conform to the legal definition of torture and constitute grave violations of constitutional and international law. A functioning justice system is a prerequisite for our mutual objective of safe and healthy communities. Our communities will not be safe if we continue to ignore the treatment of people while they're incarcerated. We trust you understand the seriousness of our request.

If you lock someone in a room the size of your bathroom, verbally abuse them, beat them and then release them back out into the cities and neighborhoods, will this promote safe and healthy communities?

We are requesting that you take the following actions so that we can together take the initial steps toward addressing this fundamental threat to the health and security of all Pennsylvanians:

1. Arrange to tour the Restricted Housing Unit in a prison near you, and interview the men and women confined there; see enclosed list.
2. Advocate and arrange for hearings on human rights violations in PA prisons to be held in front of the PA General Assembly in which prisoners, their families and human rights advocates will be permitted to address state legislators.
3. Introduce legislation to abolish solitary confinement as it is currently practiced; including the creation of a committee to research alternatives, [see enclosed packet](#).

The Council is requesting that you reply within thirty days of our visit and indicate the actions you have and/or will take in this matter. We thank you in advance for your time and consideration in this crisis.

**“And that is why I can stand here tonight and say without exception or equivocation that the United States of America does not torture,” Barak Obama, February 24, 2009**