



# NELSON MANDELA ACT: LIMIT THE USE OF ISOLATED CONFINEMENT

**Nelson Mandela spent most of his 27 years of imprisonment in isolated confinement, which he called “the most forbidding aspect of prison life.”**

**In Illinois, there are no limits on how long a person can be held in isolated confinement, which violates an internationally recognized standard called the Nelson Mandela Rules.**

- Under the Nelson Mandela Rules<sup>1</sup>, more than 15 days in isolation is considered torture.
- A growing body of medical literature<sup>2</sup> establishes that **isolation can cause permanent damage to people's brains** and that virtually everyone who spends extended time in isolation suffers severe impacts on their mental and physical health.
- Isolated confinement in Illinois can last for a period of weeks, months, years, or even decades. **People can be confined in cells that measure 6 x 9 feet, which is smaller than the average parking space.**
- Despite this well-established evidence of harm, some people in Illinois prisons have spent more than two decades in isolated confinement.
- Isolated confinement is generally costlier than general population housing. **There is no peer-reviewed study or other evidence that it improves facility safety.**



**The mind begins to turn on itself and one desperately wants something outside of oneself on which to fix one's attention. I have known men who took half a dozen lashes in preference to being locked up alone.**

**SB 2257 would create the Nelson Mandela Act, also known as the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act.** This bill would bring Illinois into compliance with the Nelson Mandela Rules by limiting the use of isolated confinement in prisons, jails, and immigration facilities, and by requiring:

- Everyone be allowed out of their cells at least four hours a day, or that,
- When a person needs to be kept in a cell for more than 20 hours a day, that can only last 10 days in any 180-day period.
- The Illinois Department of Corrections to post online quarterly reports on the use of isolated confinement.

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Nelson Mandela Rules in 2015. The First United Nations Congress passed rules related to the treatment of incarcerated people as early as 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Law & Neuroscience: The Case of Solitary Confinement by Jules Lobel & Huda Akil (2018) and A Sourcebook on Solitary Confinement by Sharon Shalev (2008).