

Representative Marvin Abney, Chair
Committee on Finance
Rhode Island House of Representatives

July 22, 2020

Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk
Committee on Finance
Rhode Island House of Representatives

Dear Chair Abney and members of the Finance Committee,

I'm writing as a Rhode Islander and constituent. I live at 68 Dexter St. in Providence, RI (Rep. Williams' district). I urge you to not let a budget pass out of committee unless it begins the process of defunding the ACI high security center with a goal of completely closing the center over the next couple years. The Governor's proposed budget includes closure of two modules within High Security, but for the sake of Rhode Islanders—whether the incarcerated Rhode Islanders who are often unfairly and cruelly contained in high security, their families, or the taxpayers on whom the exorbitant cost is imposed when we desperately need funding for other priorities—this budget must go further and move to close the High Security Center entirely.

Maximum security and long-term confinement is immoral, expensive, and ineffective. Over the last couple of months, many of us have experienced—for the first time, really—a form of confinement during isolation and social distancing. That is nothing compared to the fully dehumanizing conditions of long-term confinement. Long-term solitary confinement is a violation of UN rules. The current building is in poor condition that even further threatens health and safety of the incarcerated individuals.

The goal of any justice system should be to make our community a better, healthier, and safer place to live for all. To me and many other Rhode Islanders, this means moving towards a justice system based on restoration, education, and reconciliation—not punishment. At \$200,000 per prisoner *per year*, the High Security Center does is waste taxpayer money. Why are we spending so much when we could be spending more on schools, stopping climate change, or funding public health? Building stronger social programs would do more to stop the root causes of crime than imprisonment ever has.

Countries across the world provide an example of what a restorative justice system could look like. I hope that we follow their lead and build a better justice system. A place to start would be to stop funding the High Security Center and require that the state create a plan for closing the Center and moving towards a justice system that is not based on immoral punishment approaches like solitary and max security.

Sincerely,

Kai Salem
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