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**TESTIMONY OF
JENNIFER BOURN, ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER**

**Judiciary Committee
March 27, 2017**

**Raised Bill No. 7302
An Act Concerning Isolated Confinement and Correctional Staff Training and Wellness**

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports ***Raised Bill No. 7302, An Act Concerning Isolated Confinement and Correctional Staff Training and Wellness***. This bill ensures that inmates who are especially sensitive and vulnerable to the damaging effects of isolated confinement (children, inmates with disabilities or with serious mental illness) will not be subjected to such confinement except for extremely limited durations under emergency or other need-based circumstances. The bill also establishes important restrictions on the use of isolated confinement for *any* inmate, curbing the infliction of pain and damage that comes from such confinement and promoting rehabilitation and successful re-entry into the community. Finally, this bill creates welcome transparency and promotes accountability in our state's use of such confinement by requiring that the Department of Correction publish information on its website.

This Office has substantial experience with and exposure to inmates who have been subjected to periods of isolated confinement in our correctional system. The significant damaging effects of such confinement are well-established and widely reported. Our own experience lines up with these reports. Some of the categories of damage and behaviors we have observed or encountered include: exacerbation of existing mental illness and mental health issues, self-harming behaviors and suicide attempts, paranoid and obsessive thinking, stunted social skills and loss of relationships with members of the community and other inmates, diminished mental acuity and problems with memory, sleep disturbances, loss of sense of value and

purpose, and extreme and intense feelings of despair and hopelessness. A group of medical and other scientific and health-related professionals discussed the collections of studies examining the effects of solitary confinement in a recent amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court.¹ These experts powerfully summarized the findings, explaining:

The wealth of medical and other scientific and health-related research examining the consequences of prolonged use of solitary confinement overwhelmingly concludes that it inflicts profound psychological damage. Studies across nations and decades conclude that the social isolation, sensory deprivation, and extreme idleness inherent in solitary confinement is psychologically toxic and deprives inmates of the basic human needs to function. This leads to dramatic mental deterioration, even in previously healthy individuals.

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports this bill because it significantly limits inmates' exposure to isolated confinement and works to prevent this "profound psychological damage."

¹ The amicus brief in *Ziglar v. Abbasi*, Docket No. 15-1358 (argued 1/18/17) may be found at: <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/ziglar-v-turkmen/>