

Kriss Worthington

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ACTION CALENDAR
September 10, 2013

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Kriss Worthington

Subject: Open Letter to Governor Jerry Brown to Stop the Torture in California

Prisons

RECOMMENDATION

Endorse the *stopthetortureca.org* open letter to Governor Jerry Brown to stop torture in California prisons.

BACKGROUND

Over 30,000 California State prisoners have gone on hunger strike in the month of July 2013 to oppose the solidarity confinement policy, reduce solitary confinement to a five-year limit, seek education and rehabilitation programs, and the right to make monthly phone calls. The strike is centered on inmates' complaints about being held long-term in security housing units, or solitary confinement.

Well over ten thousand adult prisoners are currently being held in some form of solitary confinement in California prisons - 80,000 in total across the United States. Many of the inmates are locked up in an 11'7" x 7'7" windowless concrete box/cell for at least 22 ½ hours a day, day in day out, year after year. Prisoners are without sunlight, fresh air, or human touch. In some cases prisoners can't even receive a phone call unless a family member has died.

The City of Berkeley should support the stop of indefinite and long-term, extreme isolation adult prisoners are faced with when placed in extended solitary confinement in housing facilities such as the Security Housing Units(SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison and facilities like SHU in prison all throughout California and the United States.

Several prominent community and civil rights leaders have supported the open letter including Angela Davis, an Author, Scholar, and an distinguished Professor Emerita of UCSU; Noam Chomsky, an Emeritus Professor MIT, Linguist, Cognitive scientist, Political critic; Reverend Jesse L. Jackson the Founder of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition; Daniel 'Nane' Alejandrez the Founder and Executive Director of Barrios Unido; and Rabbi Michael Lerner the founder of the Tikkun magazine.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachment:

Open Letter to Governor Jerry Brown

OPEN LETTER GOV. JERRY BROWN

STOP THE TORTURE IN CALIFORNIA PRISONS

Well over ten thousand adult prisoners are currently being held in some form of solitary confinement in California prisons – 80,000 in total across the United States.

Among the worst form of solitary confinement is the indefinite and long-term, extreme isolation of the Security Housing Units (the SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison, California's "supermax". Locked in a 11'7" x 7'7" windowless concrete box/cell for at least 22 ½ hours a day, day in day out, year after year, prisoners endure without sunlight, fresh air or human touch. In contrast to every other system in the United States, prisoners can't even receive a phone call unless a family member has died.

Over 500 prisoners have been locked down in the Pelican Bay SHU for over 10 years. About 80 of them have been in solitary for over 20 years and at least two prisoners have been isolated for over 40 years. This is a policy that condemns to permanent life long isolation.

Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture. Cut off from any normal human interaction, enduring sensory and physical deprivation, many prisoners describe their lockdown in the SHU as being "buried alive". The State of California asserts that solitary confinement is not a form of punishment, but rather an "administrative assignment" to insure the safety of the prison and the public. These conditions of torture will not make anyone safer, or prepare men subjected to such dehumanizing conditioning for eventual release.

We stand together against these shameful practices and consider them extensions of the same inhumanity practiced at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. In defense of the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we, the undersigned, call on Governor Jerry Brown to end this torture at Pelican Bay and all California Prisons immediately.