



Stop Solitary CT Statement on Governor Lamont's Veto of the PROTECT Act

July 1, 2021

Yesterday Governor Lamont issued his first and only veto of 2021 in order to reject legislation protecting the well-being of incarcerated people. The PROTECT Act (SB 1059) would have safeguarded both incarcerated people and correctional staff from the most harmful and traumatic conditions in Connecticut prisons. It would have ended the deeply racist practice of long-term isolation, a status where nearly 90% of individuals are people of color. The bill passed with bipartisan support in both chambers and after lengthy negotiations between the legislature and the Governor's own Commissioner of Correction. In vetoing it, Governor Lamont defied the democratic will of the people and disregarded the humanity of the incarcerated people in his custody.

Executive Order 21-1, issued by Governor Lamont in lieu of S.B. 1059, is wholly insufficient to address the well-documented human rights violations that are continuing to occur in Connecticut prisons and that the PROTECT Act would have remedied, including abuses outlined by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture. Although E.O. 21-1 purports to end prolonged isolation, in reality the order essentially preserves the status quo. The order gives the DOC broad discretion to impose isolation for undefined "disciplinary violations" and ensures only two hours out of cell per day for individuals subject to that sanction, which may be imposed up to 30 days in any 60 day period. Protections for vulnerable groups – including juveniles and persons with mental illness – are wholly discretionary, and the order does nothing to ban abusive chaining or to ensure that incarcerated people have access to loved ones. Given that an executive order can be withdrawn at any time, E.O. 21-1 is no substitute for statutory protections and independent oversight. In sum, contrary to the Governor's claim that "I fully support the purpose of [S.B. 1059] to make certain that isolated confinement is not used in any correctional facility in Connecticut," E.O. 21-1 changes very little and invites future abuses.

Over the last 18 months, the Governor has repeatedly refused to meet with Stop Solitary CT. Instead, he has verbally reassured activists while crafting this slapdash and ineffective Executive Order out of public view. If he had spoken with directly impacted activists, Governor Lamont would have known that reducing solitary confinement has been documented to improve safety, not undermine it, as lessons learned from other states have shown. He would have learned that the PROTECT Act includes multiple provisions to ensure that immediate risks can be safely contained. Most importantly, he would have understood that the people of Connecticut refuse to accept that our state is locking people up and chaining them down instead of offering second chances. In vetoing the PROTECT Act, Governor Lamont is standing against the people, against a bipartisan coalition in the legislature, and for the continued torture of predominantly Black and brown people. Stop Solitary CT and allied organizations will keep up the fight to end the abuse that Governor Lamont endorsed by vetoing the bill. During an era wherein the nation is reckoning with a legacy of structural racism, particularly in the criminal legal system, Connecticut must be a leader on this front. Vetoing the PROTECT Act speaks volumes—Governor Lamont, and his administration, has proven to be out of touch, anti-democratic, and behind the times. Advocates and survivors with lived experience will not stop fighting until these abuses no longer exist in the Constitution State.