



January 25, 2024

**National Police
Accountability Project**

*A Project of the National
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**MEMO OF SUPPORT FOR INT NO 549A
TO END SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY
Winter 2024**

The National Police Accountability Project is writing to thank Speaker Adrienne Adams and the veto-proof supermajority of the New York City Council for passing Int No 549A, and to urge the Council to override the Mayor's inappropriate veto of this bill. Now is the moment to make 549A the law of New York City to finally end solitary confinement once and for all in New York City jails and replace it with alternative forms of separation that are [scientifically proven](#) to reduce violence and better protect people's health. Solitary confinement is torture. It causes devastating harm. It worsens safety for everyone. It has no place in the City of New York, and the City Council must end it now.

The National Police Accountability Project ("NPAP") is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending police and correctional officer violence by holding law enforcement accountable to constitutional and professional standards. Solitary confinement is an abuse as harmful as any other form of state violence perpetrated in American jails and prisons. Moreover, the practice is imposed disproportionately against Black, Brown and Indigenous people and rarely passes constitutional muster. Accordingly, NPAP strongly supports overriding the Mayor's veto to enact Int No 549A.

Overriding the Mayor's veto to enact Int No. 549A is urgently needed now to stop the torture of solitary confinement and improve the safety, health, and well-being of people incarcerated in the city jails, staff working in the jails, and all of our outside communities.

Predominantly inflicted on Black and Latinx people, solitary causes devastating physical and mental harm, and too often leads to death. Solitary causes people to engage in [self-mutilation and suicide](#). It causes [heart disease, anxiety, depression, and psychosis](#). [Research shows](#) even only one or two days in solitary leads to significantly heightened risk of death by accident, suicide, violence, overdose, and other causes. [Layleen Polanco](#), [Kalief Browder](#), [Brandon Rodriguez](#), [Erick Tavira](#), [Andy Henriquez](#), [Bradley Ballard](#), [Jason Echeverria](#), and [Carina Montes](#), are just some of the people who died because of solitary in New York City.

By making it more likely that people will act in a harmful way when solitary causes them to deteriorate, solitary also [worsens](#), rather than improves, safety for everyone: incarcerated people, staff, and outside communities. The evidence is clear: what actually works to address violence is the exact opposite of solitary: pro-social program-based interventions involving full days of out-of-cell group engagement, like the [CAPS/PACE programs](#) as originally operated in NYC jails, the [Merle Cooper Program in NYS](#), and [the RSVP program](#) in San Francisco jails. For example, the RSVP program included people who had carried out acts of assault, sexual assault, and other violent acts, and led to a precipitous drop in violence among participants to the point of having zero in-jail incidents over a one year period and reducing re-arrests for violence in the community by 83%. Best practices in [youth](#) and [mental health](#) facilities limit isolation to minutes or hours at most, with positive impacts on safety and people's health and well-being.

Despite the fact that solitary causes devastating harm and worsens safety, the NYC Department of Correction continues to use [solitary confinement by various other names](#), including in a way that is fueling the current overall deadly crisis in the city jails. DOC continues to inflict solitary confinement in [shower cages and so-called de-escalation units](#), as well as solitary 23+ hours a day for months at a time, and even over a year. Being locked alone in a two foot extension of the cell is not "out of cell" time; [mental health experts](#) have said this form of solitary will cause the same harm as other forms, particularly because the main harm of solitary is social isolation.

[Brandon Rodriguez](#) died in Aug. 2021 after he was locked in solitary in a shower cage. The city jails locked [Elijah Muhammad](#) in solitary in those same shower cages in June 2022 to the point he was found with a ligature around his neck, and then subsequently placed Elijah in another [form of solitary confinement](#), leading to his death in July 2022. Despite his known mental health needs, [Erick Tavira](#) was locked in solitary before he died by suicide in October 2022.

The City Council now has the opportunity and obligation to finally end solitary confinement in New York City jails once and for all by overriding the Mayor's ill-conceived veto. Intro. No. 549A will end solitary confinement and prevent new forms of solitary, including by providing definitions for basic terms like "cell" and "out-of-cell". At the same time, it will authorize alternative forms of separation – without isolation – that have been proven to be more effective at enhancing safety, health, and well-being by utilizing full days of out of cell congregate programming and activities that actually take place outside of a cell and with other people.

A national [poll](#) showed broad bipartisan support for ending solitary confinement directly in line with the provisions of Int. No. 549 by a +32-point margin, with 78% of Democrats, 61% of Independents, and 51% of Republicans supporting it. The entire New York City Democratic [federal House delegation](#) has urged the City Council to end solitary. [Over 160 leading civil rights, human rights, and racial justice organizations](#) have urged the City Council to end solitary. [74 state lawmakers](#) called out NYC DOC's [fake bans](#) as not only continuing solitary by another name but violating the HALT Solitary Confinement Law, and urged the City Council to act.

Now is the time to act before another person is tortured or another New Yorker's life is lost. We again thank the City Council and respectfully urge the Council to override the Mayor's veto of Int No 549A to finally end solitary confinement once and for all and instead utilize alternative forms of separation proven to reduce violence and better support people's health.

Sincerely,

Lauren Bonds
Executive Director
National Police Accountability Project