

### TESTIMONIAL FROM GERALD EASTERLING:

**ON THE EFFECTS SOLITARY CONFINEMENT**

“ After spending 3 years in intensive solitary confinement, deprived of human contact, I had become super-sensitive to the 5 basic human senses. This deliberate and intentional stripping of the cell down to an isolation cell, then the stripping of the individual down to the basic necessities... even the sight of one's own [reflection in a mirror] is denied. And no matter how strong a person is... under these adverse conditions of confinement one tends to crave a change of scenery and location... just [a change from seeing] the same old everyday mind-deadening routine and faceless faces, hear[ing] the quiet and indescribable silence that seems to speak louder than noise, smell[ing] the foul stale and contemptible odor so common to everyday existence in this bottomless pit. One seeks to touch base with and feel and embrace another human in an intimate and sensitive and humane and compassionate and personal way as opposed to the impersonal and inhumane and insensitive and degrading manner. One develops a strong, intense desire to taste various foods besides the same old tasteless and non-variety and every day, recycled meals...

The human mind can become so debased and so dehumanized, and sink so low that if one isn't so careful, there is a tendency to adjust and conform and accustom oneself to a standard of living that is lower than that which exists within the animal kingdom. ”

### TESTIMONIAL FROM TIMOTHY SIDNEY (NOW DECEASED):

**ON NEGLIGENT MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT**

“ I write in regard to mental health, my mental health! I been incarcerated a little over 7 years and I'm worst! [Before coming here] I had not one scar on my body, now my body will tell you 7 years' worth of cruel unusual acts in scars! ... As I write you this letter, I'm currently housed in Waupun seg unit... I'm subject to all type of cruelty, aged trays, Impartial Hearing, Excessive force, dirty cell guards, no mental health treatment for my PTSD, so I cut a lot for grounding. COs (correctional officers) here in their seg building are putting razor blades, unprescribed pills in my cells even in my observation cell before being placed on suicide watch...

Some people want a way, some want lawsuits, some want revenge, but I just want help, treatment because I go home soon and I don't want to go home like this, so please reach out because I'm to the point of no return! ... I was housed in seg from 2012 to 2015 [for self-harm]... the charges was [always] either misuse of medication or disfigurement. All I ask is that you reach, because I need to be touched. ”

*This testimony was written by Sidney in May 2019, shortly before his release from Waupun. He was found dead in Milwaukee on November 16, 2019.*

This one-page document is a brief introduction and summary of Forum for Understanding Prison's *Torture in Wisconsin Prisons* report. The full report is available on [PrisonForum.org](http://PrisonForum.org). Incarcerated people may request a full report by writing to: Ben Turk 2843 N Bremen St #2, Milwaukee WI 53212 or via email using corrlinks at [insurgent.ben@gmail.com](mailto:insurgent.ben@gmail.com)

## Background

### *The historical roots of Wisconsin prison torture*

- **Tough on Crime** laws expand sentences, policing, and incarceration rates.
- **Austerity** policies close mental health facilities.
- **1999 - Wisconsin opens the Supermax** in Boscobel.
- **Administrative codes** change to fill the facility.
- **Wisconsin goes from “around 12”** people in long term solitary to **nearly 500**.
- **2002 - Courts limit the Supermax**, converting it to a maximum.
- **Solitary units** with the same conditions open in other facilities across the state.
- **Hundreds of mentally ill** people are held in long term solitary confinement.
- **Restraint torture** becomes increasingly routine in solitary units, especially for the mentally ill.
- **2015 - system-wide re-evaluations**. Many diagnoses are changed to hide the torture of mentally ill people.
- **2016 - Hunger strikes** against solitary confinement and force feeding proliferate.
- **Suicides in the DOC spike**, from 2 per year to 12 in 2016. They remain elevated.

# FFUP RECOMMENDATIONS:

## 1 - Retrain staff to treat people with respect and humanity.

- Reduce staff turnover by improving work conditions and eliminating policies that require staff to abuse people.

## 2 - Acknowledge that the DOC is not correcting people or protecting public safety.

- The Wisconsin prison system targets low income communities of color for abuse, decimating family structures and circulating trauma and violence.

## 3 - Create a mental health treatment center.

- The Wisconsin Resource Center (WRC) is too limited for the needs of the state.

## 4 - Conduct an independent Mental Health review.

- Release mentally ill from solitary and those who were put in based on anonymous tips or retaliation. Do not trust the DOC to conduct these reviews.

## 5 - Make treatment available to people maxing out their sentences.

- Never hold someone in solitary confinement up until their release date.

## 6 - Restrict solitary confinement to 15 days at a time.

- More than that is considered torture by the UN and international community.

## 7 - Implement small improvements now.

- Medical treatment, mental health determinations and placement should be determined by qualified professionals. Reduce property restrictions. Rotate staff out of solitary confinement units every 3 months. Use video cameras more and release footage to the public.

## 8 - Reduce the prison population to ensure future reforms are possible and affordable.

- Release 2800 parole eligible people, now. End crimeless revocations. Close deteriorating facilities. Reinvest savings in treatment and assistance.



*Forum For Understanding Prisons (FFUP) is a nonprofit that evolved out of concern when the Supermax opened in Boscobel, WI in the early 2000s with its 400+ isolation cells. FFUP's mandate is to be a bridge between prisoners, their families and the outside world. Our major effort is spent corresponding with prisoners, advocating for them, verifying their reports as far as is possible and getting "the word" out to the greater community.*

*The prisoners and their families have, in a sense, educated us and given us a unique perspective which we try to balance with what we know of workings "out here". We believe this perspective, if considered, can help lead our corrections system back to functioning effectively, safely and humanely.*