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Hon. Bill de Blasio
Office of the Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

August 27, 2014

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

On behalf of the New York City Bar Association, I write to urge you to sign Int. 292-2014, a bill recently passed by the City Council that will require the New York City Department of Correction, in conjunction with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, to post quarterly reports online about the people who are placed in solitary confinement at city jails.

The use of isolated confinement in jails and prisons is a matter of growing concern for the public at large and for those particularly involved in the oversight of correctional institutions. In March 2013, the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on Torture called on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to investigate the practice of solitary confinement and its harmful effects in the Americas.¹ The New York State Bar Association also recently urged that New York State "profoundly restrict" the use of long-term solitary confinement.²

In New York City alone, nearly 1,000 people are held in isolated confinement, and the number both of isolation cells and of people subjected to isolation has grown substantially in the last decade. The New York City jail system, which is the second largest in the country, takes in around 80,000 people per year and incarcerates around 12,000 people on any given day. In this system, the percentage of people in isolated confinement increased from 2.7% to 7.5% between 2004 and 2013. In July 2013, 140 of the people in solitary confinement in New York City jails were adolescents, 73% of whom were diagnosed as suffering from either serious or moderate mental illness. Forty-one percent of the total population of people in the main solitary confinement unit in New York City jails were diagnosed as having a mental illness, and 84% of the women in solitary confinement had diagnosed mental health needs.³

¹ See "UN Special Rapporteur on torture warns about abuse of solitary confinement in the Americas," United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *available at* <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13134&LangID=E>

² New York State Bar Association Civil Rights Committee, Report to House of Delegates (January 2013), *available at* <https://www.nysba.org/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=26699>

³ See New York City Bar report in support of A.8588-A/S.6466-A ("Humane Alternatives to Long Term {HALT} Solitary Confinement Act") at pp. 3 – 4 (and references cited therein), *available at*:

It is fitting that this bill was passed at a time of greater public scrutiny concerning not only the use of solitary confinement in the city's jails, but also alongside reports of the increased use of force against inmates, including those who may be suffering from mental illness. The bill is an important first step towards increasing transparency and accountability in the city's jails and will provide useful data that can guide policy decisions. Among other things, the required quarterly reports will include information on: the number of inmates sent to punitive segregation⁴; the length of time spent in segregation; the age, race and gender of inmates in segregation; the number of inmates who committed or attempted suicide; the number of inmate deaths from causes other than suicide; the number of inmates transferred to psychiatric hospitals; the number of inmates who requested mental health services and received it; the number of instances of allegations of sexual assault involving staff and inmates; and use-of-force statistics.

We applaud the City Council for shedding light on this important issue and taking a positive first step towards reforming an inhumane and ineffective practice. We hope you will sign this bill into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra L. Raskin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Debra" being more prominent than the last name "Raskin".

Debra L. Raskin

cc: Commissioner Joseph Ponte, NYC Department of Correction
NYC Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito
NYC Council Member Daniel Dromm, Bill Sponsor
Emma Wolfe, Director, Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs

<http://www2.nycbar.org/pdf/report/uploads/20072748-HALTSolitaryConfinementReport.pdf>

⁴ The bill defines "punitive segregation" to mean "city jail housing units where inmates who have been found guilty of violating department rules may be temporarily housed as a sanction for their offense(s) and restricted to their cells more than fifteen hours per day."