



SARAHANA SHRESTHA
Assemblywoman 103rd District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

APRIL 13, 2025

ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATORS

LEVINE, UCHITELLE, MCCOULLOUGH, CRISWELL, DONALDSON,
GAVARIS, CLINTON, SPERRY, STEWART, GREENE,
HARMON, HEWITT, NOLAN, AND COLLINS
244 FAIR ST, KINGSTON, NY 12401

Subject: Passage of Res. No. 165 would be an endorsement of torture

Dear County Legislators,

At a time when regular people are increasingly demonized so that due process and civil rights can be more easily undermined, I urge you to vote NO on Res. No. 165—a resolution that endorses torture by effectively demanding a repeal of the HALT Law. HALT is short for Humane Alternative to Long Term Solitary Confinement, a state law that recognizes solitary confinement as torture, *limits* its use, and allows people to be placed in alternative forms of separation proven to reduce violence. The fact that the resolution asks to amend the law so as to fully roll it back – the same as a repeal – without specifying any amendments shows the call is a meritless gesture, one that cedes ground to a broader push to undo our hard-won steps toward social justice. Additionally, the resolution text is rife with inaccuracies and conclusions that are contrary to the data.

Evidence shows that solitary confinement does not repair people – it leaves them *worse* than where they started. It causes mental deterioration, including psychosis, paranoia, anxiety, depression, and self-harm, and it causes physical deterioration, including heart disease. It has also lead to death, including by suicide. Such impacts severely hurt chances of reform, and *increase* incidences of outbursts and altercations, making prisons and jails *more* dangerous for everyone, including the staff.

Prior to the enactment of HALT, people were allowed to be locked in solitary confinement 23 - 24 hours a day, for months, years, decades, and even for over 30 years – including the disabled or pregnant. The resolution's own data shows that during this time, before HALT went into effect in 2022, assaults in state prisons increased 124% over 10 years, and peaked in 2021 with

1,173 assaults on staff—in other words, solitary confinement was *not* effective at curbing assaults. What’s more, a [2024 report](#) by the inspector general found that HALT hasn’t even been properly implemented since it went into effect, meaning we have yet to see its results.

What does HALT actually do? Contrary to the resolution’s claim, it does *not* “eliminate any meaningful disciplinary sanctions for inmates [sic] who commit violent acts.” The law limits solitary confinement to 15 consecutive days, or 20 days in any 60-day period, restricts the criteria that can lead to it, provides additional procedural protections prior to it, and exempts those who are pregnant, or disabled, or over 55, or under 21 from such confinement—Ben van Zandt died by suicide at the age of 21 after 10 days in solitary confinement, and young people disproportionately commit suicide in solitary.

Unlike unrestricted solitary confinement, the alternate forms of separation HALT provides have a track record of reducing violence and preparing people to function as productive community members once they’re out.

As you take this vote, please remember the majority of people who end up incarcerated are not in fact violent. Anyone’s family member or friend can end up there, especially if they’re caught up in a cycle of racialized poverty. For the sake of every individual’s right to redeem themselves and the families who bear the stress, we should want assurance that while people are serving their sentence, their mental and physical health, and their path to recovery should be protected. It benefits no one to have a criminal justice system that ruins rather than repairs. I trust you will stand for Ulster County’s commitment to social justice and urge you to vote no. Please reach out to my office should you have any questions about the law.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarahana Shrestha
State Assemblymember, District 103