



## **NC Prison Mental Health Advocacy Coalition Applauds Study: “Impact of a Prison Therapeutic Diversion Unit on Mental and Behavioral Health Outcomes”**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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The NC Prison Mental Health Advocacy Coalition applauds NC Department of Public Safety (NC DPS), NC DHHS-Division of Public Health and UNC-CH’s Injury Prevention Research Center for examining the dramatic benefits of care and treatment for people in prison with mental health disabilities. A [NC study recently published in the American Journal of Preventative Health](#) lays bare the harmful, too often deadly, effects of prison solitary confinement on people with mental health disabilities. The findings confirm what has been known for years – solitary confinement is harmful to people and results in life-long trauma, suicide and self-injurious behavior. According to the Study, care and treatment of people with mental illness in prison leads to safer prison environments for those who work and live in the prison as well as for our communities that will receive the more than 20,000 people who return every year. The Study confirms that care and treatment while in prison produce better outcomes for everyone.

Since 2011, our coalition of NC mental health advocacy groups (Disability Rights NC, NAMI-NC, NC Psychiatric Association, NC Psychological Association, and the National Association of Social Workers – NC Chapter) has actively urged NC DPS, the NC General Assembly, and the Governor to provide care and treatment for people with mental illness who become incarcerated in NC prisons and to stop subjecting people with disabilities to solitary confinement. We advocated for the 2015 appropriation establishing Therapeutic Diversion Units in NC DPS after the tragic death of Mr. Michael Kerr, who died of dehydration while in full restraints in solitary confinement during a psychiatric crisis.

The Study confirms what has been known for years: our prisons will be safer and people will return to our communities healthier if prison mental health treatment is fully funded. “This study provides clear evidence that North Carolina should invest more in best practices like TDUs and funding behavioral health staff including social workers that result in better outcomes for North Carolinians,” said Valerie Arendt, Executive Direction of NASW-NC.



“We will continue to advocate for more funding for services and staff in North Carolina prisons, and urge the end of the dangerous and harmful practice of long-term solitary confinement,” said Susan H. Pollitt, Supervising Attorney with DRNC.

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### **About Disability Rights North Carolina**

Disability Rights North Carolina (DRNC) is the federally mandated protection and advocacy system in North Carolina, dedicated to advancing the rights of all people with disabilities, of all ages, statewide. DRNC is an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a member of the National Disability Rights Network. Learn more about Disability Rights North Carolina at [disabilityrightsncc.org](http://disabilityrightsncc.org).

### **Contact:**

Susan H. Pollitt, DRNC Supervising Attorney  
[Susan.pollitt@disabilityrightsncc.org](mailto:Susan.pollitt@disabilityrightsncc.org)  
919-856-2195, ext. 224

Luke Wollard, DRNC Attorney  
[Luke.woollard@disabilityrightsncc.org](mailto:Luke.woollard@disabilityrightsncc.org)  
919-856-2195, ext. 211