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Advocates want to "ban the box"

Posted By [Cara Matthews](#) On June 4, 2007 @ 5:34 pm In [prisons](#), [Albany](#), [state legislature](#), [Uncategorized](#) | [No Comments](#)

On Monday, advocates who want solitary confinement banned for seriously mentally ill prisoners made their tenth trip to Albany in two years to press for legislative change. Ray Ortiz of the Urban Justice Center, a former prisoner who spent time in solitary, also known as the "box", said the spaces inmates are confined to are like "toilets with beds." They have to eat and sleep in the "toilet," and they get treatment by speaking with someone on the other side of a locked door.

"Solitary confinement cannot be part of a solution in any way, shape or form for people with psychiatric illness. It's only going to make them worse," he said.

"If you place me in the SHU (special housing unit,) in a week I will be a sick man," he said.

Advocates said that a settlement agreement in April that provides more protections for mentally ill inmates and 600 new treatment beds, and the \$60 million in the state budget to improve conditions do not go far enough.

The legislation they are seeking, similar to a bill vetoed by former Gov. George Pataki last year, is on the Senate calendar for floor debate and in the Assembly Ways and Means Committee.

It would: more->more->

- Require that mentally ill prisoners in solitary confinement, also known as the "box", be transferred to outside programs that treat their symptoms and address behavioral concerns.
- Empower the Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities to monitor treatment and placement of prisoners with psychiatric disabilities.
- Require 40 hours of training for staff of the new residential treatment programs and eight hours of training for correctional officers on mental illness and the management of prisoners who are mentally ill.

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