

Governor Charlie Baker,
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

I'm writing to voice my concern for Wayland Coleman, Massachusetts Department of Corrections prisoner #W65484 at MCI Norfolk, who has been placed in solitary confinement as an act of retaliation for communicating with the outside world about the treatment that he and other prisoners at Norfolk have been subjected to over the course of their confinement, and *officially* for stockpiling clean water in his cell. As you know, the water at MCI-Norfolk is notoriously bad, leading to a multi-million dollar infrastructure overhaul currently in production, but has taken over six years to complete. While the DOC cites reports that claim the water is just below action levels, this is in contrast to reports compiled by half a dozen experts in the field of public health, as outlined in The Boston Globe last June by reporter David Abel.

While I understand that Department of Corrections officials have stated before that "*there is no solitary confinement in Massachusetts*", putting another name on the practice does nothing to end the suffering it entails, whether you call it "segregation" or "special housing". It is also unacceptable in a society that claims to be free for anyone, incarcerated or otherwise, to be penalized for whom they choose to freely associate.

To not only allow, but institutionally support the use of a practice that the United Nations has classified as an act of torture is unconscionable. It is even more reprehensible to do so as an act of retaliation for dissent. This is an act of despotism, not rehabilitation or correction.

Empirical research on solitary confinement (regardless of the name or variations in implementation) overwhelmingly confirms that such treatment is unimaginably damaging to people, even when done ostensibly for "their own good". There are no circumstances where isolating people from other human beings against their will can be done safely or ethically.

Wayland is a human being with family and friends and a massive community of supporters who love and care for him, and we demand that Wayland be returned to general population immediately and steps be taken to prevent this blatant abuse of prison procedures from happening again.

Sincerely,

A constituent

Postscript: I invite you to see this image of a cloth that was used for three days as a personal water filter by a prisoner at Norfolk. This image confirms what prisoners have been saying for two decades, and bespeaks to a human rights crisis at the prison. This is why Wayland is collecting bottled water:

