



Calling Members of Congress & Your State Legislator: What to Say

The most effective way to encourage your state legislator to take action to stop solitary confinement for youth is to call and speak with staff in your legislators' offices. When you speak to the staff member, their job is to listen to you. A phone conversation with a legislator's staff member makes more of an impact than an email or a letter that can be c

When you call your legislator, you should make two requests. First, you should ask that your legislator speak out against solitary confinement for kids. Second, you should ask that he or she work to end solitary confinement in your state. The longer you speak to the staff member, the more effective your call will be.

During the call, you can use a list of key points about solitary confinement **OR** a sample phone call script that you can read during the call. Both are included in this guide.



Key Points to Make During Phone Call

If you prefer key points to make during the phone call, use this:

- Keeping kids out of solitary confinement is an important issue to me.
- Solitary confinement is happening now to kids across the country.
- Solitary confinement is especially damaging for kids – it can cause permanent mental and emotional harm.
- Youth are more likely to commit suicide or hurt themselves in solitary confinement. Half of suicides in juvenile facilities happen when kids are in solitary confinement.
- Some states limit solitary confinement for youth and it actually makes facilities safer.
- Please commit to taking action to protect our kids from solitary confinement by:
 - (1) Speaking out against solitary confinement for kids; and
 - (2) Working to end solitary confinement for youth in our state.



Sample Phone Call Script

If you prefer to read from a script during the phone call, use this:

This is a sample script that you can read during a call with legislators' staff. You can use this entire script or use just some sections to talk to legislators' staff.

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a constituent raising an issue I am concerned about. I want my representative to know that I think we should stop putting kids in solitary confinement.

Thousands of kids are put in solitary confinement every week in juvenile facilities across the country. It could be happening in our state. Solitary confinement is especially damaging for kids. It can have long-lasting and devastating effects on young people, including trauma, anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide. Youth are more likely to commit suicide or hurt themselves in solitary confinement. In fact, half of suicides in juvenile facilities happen when kids are in solitary confinement.

Solitary confinement is harmful, not helpful. It prevents kids from getting programs and services, and ultimately makes facilities less safe for staff and kids. Several states have already reduced solitary confinement, and our state should follow in this direction.

I hope my representative is aware of the story of Kalief Browder. Kalief was a 16-year old high school student walking home from a party when he was arrested for allegedly stealing a backpack. He spent three years in jail awaiting trial; two of those years in solitary confinement. The case never went to trial and the charges were eventually dropped. He was released, but he never recovered from the trauma he endured in solitary confinement. In 2015, Kalief hung himself. This tragic story shows how urgent it is to stop solitary confinement for kids.

Most people would never lock a young person in a closet for hours, weeks, or days for misbehaving. Likewise, juvenile facilities must stop putting youth in solitary confinement. I hope that I can count on my representative's concern for the wellbeing of all youth.

I am calling to ask my representative to do two things:

- (1) Speak out against solitary confinement for kids; and
- (2) Work to end solitary confinement for youth in our state.

Can my representative commit to this?