

Written Testimony in Support of the “End Health Professionals’ Complicity in the Torture of Detained or incarcerated individuals act of 2025”

Submitted for the Joint Public Hearing: Safety of Persons in Custody, Transparency, and
Accountability within State Correctional Facilities
NY Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims, Crime & Correction and
NY State Assembly Standing Committee on Correction
May 14, 2025

We the undersigned submit this written testimony in support of “End Health Professionals’ Complicity in the Torture of Detained or Incarcerated Individuals Act of 2025.” We are the New York Coalition Against Torture, a group of current and future health professionals-including social workers, physicians and psychologists, legal advocates, and formerly incarcerated individuals. We are working together on this bill determined to end a culture of brutality in New York State prisons and jails which many of us have witnessed first-hand. We can no longer remain silent about and complicit with the preventable epidemic of suffering and death of incarcerated persons in New York State like Robert Brooks who was murdered as health professionals looked on.

This ground-breaking bill prohibits health professionals licensed in NY State from participating in torture and requires reporting of torture and abuse of incarcerated persons in New York State by health professionals and other correctional facility staff and volunteers, who witness torture in NY State prisons and jails. The absence of adequate protections and procedures for reporting torture in NYS carceral settings is shocking. Health professionals should not be forced to choose between their safety and complicity in torture. This bill promotes the fundamental ethics and core values of New York State health professionals. This bill will save lives.

For far too long New York State licensed health professionals have been complicit in torture by turning a blind eye and remaining silent and about abuse of incarcerated persons they witnessed or had direct knowledge about. When this bill was first introduced in 2010, it was in response to the disgraceful violations of professional ethics by U.S. health professionals-including those licensed in New York State- who participated in torture under the guise of national security at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and other clandestine jails around the world. But then and even more so now, we learned about the epidemic of torture occurring here in our own backyard in New York State prisons and jails.

Enacting this bill will promote the health and safety of incarcerated persons as well as that of all individuals working in New York State Jails and Correctional facilities. It reaffirms and is entirely consistent with health professional ethics to preserve life and to “Do No Harm.” This bill will promote the dignity and humanity of all New Yorkers.

Silence is complicity. Silence can be death. The time to act is now.

Thank you,

- Allen S. Keller, M.D. Associate Professor of Medicine and Population Health/ NYU Grossman School of Medicine; Founder, Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture
- Sandy Bernabei, LCSW
- Nicole Capozziello, MSW, PhD, Co-Director- Social Workers & Allies Against Solitary Confinement

- Mary Buser, LCSW, Author of *Lockdown on Rikers: Shocking Stories of Abuse and Injustice at New York's Notorious Jail*, Co-Director- Social Workers & Allies Against Solitary Confinement
- Jack Beck, Esq.
- Marvin Wade
- Justyna Rzewinski, LCSW, PhD(c)
- Yosef Brody, PhD
- April Strommer, MSW
- Martha Davis, PhD
- Lolayemi Charles
- Jacob Winick

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