

Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on
“Legacy of Harm: Eliminating the
Abuse of Solitary Confinement”
April 16, 2024
Questions for the Record
Senator Amy Klobuchar

For Katherine R. Peeler, MD, MA, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Medical Expert, Physicians for Human Rights, Harvard Medical School

You testified about the overuse of solitary confinement, as well as the medical, psychological, and emotional consequences of solitary confinement. How do staffing shortages impact decisions to place individuals in solitary confinement and the experience that incarcerated individuals have in this setting?

Dr. Peeler’s Response

Senator Klobuchar, this is an important question. Solitary confinement itself is what causes the harms that our research group has documented. These harms would still be true if there were perfect staffing. While a higher ratio of staff to detained persons could presumably address some of the instances where people requested or needed medical/psychological evaluation and care (and would otherwise have been placed into solitary confinement), our ultimate recommendation in this regard would be to reduce the overall amount of people in detention (and thus exposed to possible solitary confinement) rather than further scale up ICE detention settings any further.