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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | August 5, 2019

[According](#) to CNN, the cause of 27-year-old [Layleen Polanco's death](#) in June on the transgender restricted housing unit at Rikers Island in New York has been revealed as an epileptic seizure. Attorney David Shanies said that Polanco had suffered several seizures at Rikers and corrections officials were aware of her condition. When an epileptic person has a seizure, he said, they are at great risk of injury or death and unable to help themselves. They can fall, suffer trauma, or stop breathing, among other things. That is exactly how Layleen died. By leaving her locked in a cell, unmonitored, the jail created the risk of Layleens suffering a fatal seizure. The family of Polanco continues to call for a full investigation into her death. Last week, Senator Elizabeth Warren [tweeted](#), Lets be clear: Layleen Cubilette-Polanco should still be alive. Solitary confinement is cruel and inhumane. We must end this practice, enforce strict standards for medical care, and provide extra layers of protection for LGBTQ+ people.

KSAT [reported](#) that 19-year-old Ashanti Taylor died after hanging herself in her solitary confinement cell at Bexar County Jail in San Antonio, Texas. Taylor arrived at the jail on July 6 with an \$800 bond for a misdemeanor charge and likely could have been released for \$80. Despite expressing suicidal ideation, saying she would kill herself the first chance she got, and attempting suicide by drinking cleaning supplies, the teen was placed in administrative segregation, against the recommendation of the University Health Systems (UHS). The sheriffs office denies that jail staff did not follow the advice of UHS, claiming the teenagers pattern of disruptive behavior justified her placement in solitary confinement. Officials say that an investigation will be conducted into Taylors death.

PennLive [reported](#) that people held in solitary confinement at Fayette State Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania held a hunger strike for a week last month, and have once again begun refusing food, according to a group of organizers with the Human Rights Coalition. The organizers rallied outside the department of corrections headquarters in support of the hunger strikers inside, calling for an end to solitary confinement and an investigation into the health and living conditions of those in solitary now. While state officials point out that incarcerated people have access to a grievance system, Dana Lomax-Williams, one of the organizers who spent time in solitary confinement herself, asked, Who do we hold accountable? We just want some answers. Thats it. The organizers will rally outside of Governor Tom Wolfs office this Friday.

NJ.com published an [op-ed](#) calling for Essex County, New Jersey, to cancel its contract with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, after nearly a decade of reports of abusive conditions at the jail. Dating back to 2010, the New York University Law School Immigrant Rights Clinic documented denial and delay of medical care, verbal and physical abuse from officers, and lack of access to clean water and adequate food. The Essex County Correctional Facility (ECCF) has reportedly used inconsistent and excessive solitary confinement, placing 222 immigrants in solitary for a total of 2,200 days between 2013 and 2014. One man was sent to solitary for fifteen days for refusing to close his food slot when he found worms in his food. While Governor Phil Murphy recently signed a law restricting the use of solitary confinement across the state, the changes will not take effect for at least another year.

WREG [reported](#) that wrestling star Jerry Lawler has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Hardeman County Jail officials in Tennessee for the suicide of his son, Brian Lawler, in 2018. The lawsuit claims that Lawler was denied substance abuse treatment and was placed in solitary confinement, despite the sheriffs knowledge of his history of suicide attempts. The Lawlers attorney, Jeff Rosenblum, said, He was crying out for help for four to six hours, and no one gave him help. The family claims the deputy thought that their son was pretending. The lawsuit seeks \$3 million in compensatory damages and calls for the jail to protect all inmates from future harm.

KTSM [reported](#) that 35-year-old Mexican migrant Jesus Lorenzo Avila has been placed in solitary confinement at the Otero County Processing Center, a New Mexico Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility. The ACLU of New Mexico has released a statement demanding the release of Avila from solitary, alleging his isolation is punishment for speaking to the media. Avila, who has spent a total of two months in solitary, spoke to [Univision](#) about his experiences in solitary confinement at two different ICE facilities, and his story was featured in [Solitary Voices](#), a high-profile expos of the widespread use of solitary in immigration detention. According to the ACLU, ICE claims that Avilas placement in solitary resulted from his role organizing four Indian hunger strikers at the facility, though the ACLU said Avila has been denied evidence or due process and is unable to speak any common language with the hunger strikers.

The *Prince Williams Times* [reported](#) that Prince William County, Virginia, has approved an allocation of over \$350,000 towards a mental health program for women at the Prince William-Manassas Regional Jail. The program, in its pilot phase, provides mental health specialists, screenings, group therapy, counseling, and re-entry support, in an attempt to reduce recidivism rates for the approximately 100 women held at the jail. A state report revealed that 34 percent of the women in Virginia jails last year more than double the percentage of their male counterparts had a history of mental illness. The program will be especially important for psychiatrically disabled women in solitary confinement, which creates an added difficulty for successful re-entry. In Virginia jails last year, 906 people out of the 7,852 incarcerated people with mental illness were housed in solitary confinement.

Valerie Kiebala was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in The Root, Truthout, the Chicago Reporter, and Shadowproof.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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