

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/06/06/voices-solitary-con-game/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | June 6, 2014



In Fall 2012, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) unveiled its [Step Down program](#) to evaluate prisoners with indefinite terms in its notorious Security Housing Units (SHUs) for release to general population. The program immediately drew criticism from both prisoners and their advocates, who charged that even those who have spent years in the SHU may not be released under this program.

In February 2014, shortly before legislative hearings around solitary confinement, CDCR [released new proposed regulations](#) around its gang policies. Former hunger strikers and their outside allies continue to decry the program. Among their concerns is the requirement that SHU prisoners fill out a sequence of journals as [part of completing the programming](#).

Lorenzo Benton is one of those who has voiced outrage about the proposed Step Down program. Benton is currently in the SHU at Pelican Bay State Prison, participated in both 2011 hunger strikes as well as the 2013 hunger strike. He describes the problematic nature of The Con Game, the first of the journals that SHU prisoners in Step Three are required to fill out. Other individuals in Californias SHUs have [expressed similar concerns](#) about the coercive content found in the journals.

These critiques comes at a time when Californias solitary confinement policies are being debated in both houses of the state legislature, where [bills have been introduced](#), as well as in the federal courts, which have [granted class status](#) to men in long-term isolation at Pelican Bay in a lawsuit against the state. In addition, the CDCR recently proposed [new rules](#) that would expand the definition of contraband to include any publications and correspondence it deems unsavory perhaps leaving some individuals in solitary with little to read other than the likes of The Con Game. Victoria Law

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Recently, I had the (un)fortunate opportunity to peruse what is being presented as the initial stage of the CDCR (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation) tentatively approved/implemented Security Threat Group (STG) Step Down Program (SDP) for those who have been classified by prison officials as being affiliated with such a group, meriting a SHU (Security Housing Unit) placement for an indeterminate period of time in accordance with the SDP. This program, as currently structured, requires its participants, at the initial stage of the SDP, to take part in the completion of a total of fourteen self-directed journals in a 26-week period, subject to review and evaluation by prison officials, the same institutional classification committee officials who have held us in SHU all these years and who will now be responsible for continuing to make arbitrary decisions on whether or not ones responses in these journals are satisfactory enough for advancement within this program as one works towards general population release.

Now as for my own observations and analysis of the first self-directed journal that I was introduced to (titled *The Con Game*), it does not embody and/or address the needs of the majority of us in SHU, of what and who we are nor is it indicative of whats in our best interest. This journal is comprised of a series of questions that are designed to elicit a response more so of one who continues to hold true to a criminal conviction as opposed to one who has risen above that and now lives ones life in accordance with a more humane existence.

I am of the opinion that anyone with even an inkling of integrity would not respond in the affirmative to the majority of these questions (if not all) given that just about all of these questions are centered around one answering in the affirmative (yes) to a negative character trait, further acknowledging such a trait within oneself (whether one has it or not) and as an explanation of it. For example, Do you have a problem when people correct you, even if they do it in a supportive way? Yes/No. Give an example of how you might think and/or act

in this online pharmacy to order phentermine way. Do you ever play the Con Game? Yes/No. Explain. And so on. All of the questions in this journal follow a similar pattern and one cant help but believe, if one does not respond in the affirmative to said questions, that the reviewers/ evaluators of said responses would deem one a program failure, not suited for advancement within said-program because the overseers of this SDP view us all as flawed in character with no social or moral compass.

Furthermore, when I read *The Con Game*, I just about responded in the negative to each question except for one, so can reasonably conclude by doing so that I will be viewed as a program failure, stuck in purgatory (precluded from advancing forward to the next level) until one succumbs to the program, which is a form of brainwashing that is not in ones best interest.

As one looks into the minute details and its overbroad effects, one can also reasonably conclude that this Step Down Program in its current form is some type of Machiavellian debriefer tactic with a one-to-five year installment plan, designed to break ones spirit and then one into informants for the prison system. Now with the CDCR catapulting this program to the forefront while knowing full well that the majority, if not all, of us on indeterminate SHU status would not be receptive to its introduction nor of the mindset to participate in it as a result of us seeing it for what it is surely a sign of the CDCRs attempt to undermine any foreseeable real change in response to our five core demands. This attempt to thwart our forward motion and break our spirits will be futile because, as real men and women seeking humane and just treatment, we refuse to play their game (a con game). We are not debriefers and should not be treated as such!!!

Now as for those of us who survive the CDCRs policies of torture and control, it has not always been an easy task, but through fortification of will and understanding, many of us have been able to keep our priorities intact (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness).

It should also be noted, as one now takes an intense look into whats being instituted, via this Step Down Program, that it will be utilized as a means of institutionalized abuse and distrust as the CDCR carries out its latest gang management policies. These policies can subject one to a STG classification with a SHU assignment of one to four years or more for those who fall under its classification. Many of us who have already been in SHU on indeterminate status for the last five, ten, twenty, thirty years or more, who fall victim to this program, should be afforded time served and all prisoners who have spent the last four years held in SHU/Ad-Seg should and shall be released to the General Population forthwith if they have not received a SHU determinate term!!!

In conclusion, with the STG Step Down program now before us, in contrast to the previous six years policy whereby one only had to remain allegedly gang-activity free for six years to be eligible for release to General Population, this SDP requires only four years. But these four years can be just as long as the previous six years in practice because advancement in the Step Down program is not guaranteed, leaving one stuck in the SHU indeterminately. Assigning people to SHU under STG Step Down program under the illusion that one is eligible to get out of the SHU sooner, as opposed to later, is something we stand in opposition to, so with this glimpse into the imperial effects of the CDCRs gang management policy, one can expect for them to be duplicated if they are not successfully challenged and/or deterred in their attempts to circumvent real change (today).

End all solitary confinement!!!

End all indeterminate SHUs!!!

Restore a determinate SHU to all!!!

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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There can never be adequate compensation for torture. However this is a positive piece of news which should be a precedent for other cases. Theres lots of related things to mention but the most important that springs to mind is that a positive ruling such as this should remind people to be optimistic through all the darkness and navigating corruption

A federal jury last year awarded \$150,000 to Palacio Paladin, of Nashua, and Richard West, of Manchester, after deciding the conditions they endured in solitary confinement were extreme, egregious and physically harsh. In a ruling dated Sept. 28, U.S. District Judge Steven McAuliffe upheld the juries damages and also ordered the inmates be paid an additional \$35,199.82 in lawyers fees and costs.

Paladin and West spent months in solitary confinement after corrections officer Cesar Rivas accused a mob of inmates of surrounding and threatening him on July 14, 2002.

The inmates accused Rivas of lying about the incident to get them locked up in the hole, where they remained for months. (By RYAN J. HALLIDAY, Telegraph Staff Published: Wednesday, Oct. 3, 2007)

Seems CDCR is too far off.

The sad thing is when the truth is twisted and presented in ways that harm people rather than help them become better human beings.

Everyone on the outside who are eligible to vote can change this. We need to unite with a solitary voice and demand change. And in the mean time, while we have traffic cameras, drones, and cameras everywhere watching free citizens, we need cameras inside every jail, prison, and public school across America so We-The-People can log in and view, and watch live video of what is happening inside these institutions. I believe this would be a catalyst for rapid change.

Up to a point I do agree when you say that cameras should be installed in prisons, as there is the topic of privacy ofcourse (the privacy of the imprisoned I mean!), but in general I agree!

Under ONE condition that is.. that is when an abuse is discovered, the abuser will not receive a slap on the wrist and being told your poor thing, you have been the victim of a rough, though and ruthless victim and you deserve compensation for what has been done to you, you poor thing, but on the contrary, that the abuser who commits a crime against an inmate (of whatever kind or sort!) shall be punished severely, and without any delay or excuse!

IF recorded on tape and that tape turns out to be truthful then there is no need for any long procedures or long trials, then the abuser can be punished within lets say a couple of weeks and not months or years!

THAT is change to the system, changing from protecting the guards to protecting the inmates, the prisoners. as the system now is more rotten then the sickest prison system in the worst african backward country!

The American justice system is sick, rotten and were rotten apples are found they must be cut out, and those who are responsible for letting happen must be removed from their post, from guards, overseers, wardens, under-secretaries to secretaries, from governors, civil servants to federal authorities!

Cleaning up a mess needs a sharpened knife, to cut the rotten parts of the system!

I completely agree with you. Of course the privacy of the imprisoned should be protected. However if I were imprisoned I would hope that there would be someone an advocate of sorts overseeing every aspect. I dont know how safety of the imprisoned and integrity of the officers can be ensured if there are blind spots. Families of the imprisoned would most likely pay for these cameras so no cost to tax payers, and I agree action should be immediate to remove the bullies who abuse their power.

Why not establish a nationwide Solitary Day, to be observed once a year by all of Americas inmates and other parties?

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