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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | May 27, 2018

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) filed a [lawsuit](#) this week against the forced labor practices of private prison company CoreCivic, which runs Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities including the Stewart Detention Center in Georgia. The lawsuit claims that CoreCivics Dollar-a-Day program pays immigrants nearly nothing to carry out duties that in other work settings would require minimum wage payment. As the suit documents, staff at Stewart have threatened individuals with time in solitary confinement, as well as deprivation of food, clothing, and phone calls, for lack of participation in the work programs. The SPLC argues that the practices violate anti-trafficking laws.

The *Washington Post* published an [article](#) highlighting the overuse of solitary confinement in the state of Virginia. While the Virginia Department of Corrections claims to have dramatically reduced its use of restrictive housing at its supermax prisons Red Onion and Wallens Ridge, individuals held in these facilities say the step-down program that was implemented in its place is a mere extension of Virginias use of segregation. (Solitary Watch [reported](#) on the shortcomings of Virginias widely celebrated step-down program nearly two years ago.) In a letter written to the group Interfaith Action for Human Rights, a man with a history of serious mental illness explained that he completed the step-down program but still remains in solitary confinement. An ACLU report released earlier this month revealed an excessive use of solitary confinement in Virginia prisons, which still place hundreds of people, including those with mental illnesses, children, and LGBT individuals, in isolation.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [reported](#) the release of a study conducted by Craig Haney, a renowned psychologist and UC Santa Cruz professor, documenting the conditions of solitary confinement in the Special Management Unit at the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Prison (GDCP). The report called the isolation unit the harshest and most draconian in the country, finding that the individuals in the unit are among the most psychologically traumatized persons [he has] ever assessed in this context. Four individuals held at GDCP have filed federal lawsuits, claiming the extended isolation, social deprivation, lack of outside light, lack of access to reading materials, and denial of visitation have violated their constitutional rights.

[According](#) to the *Tennessean*, Gov. Bill Haslam signed a bill into law this Monday placing new restrictions on Tennessees safekeeping law, which since 2011 has led to the transfer of more than 320 pre-trial individuals to solitary confinement units in state prisons for reasons of insufficient resources in local jails. The new regulations ban placing juveniles in solitary confinement at adult prisons and mandate monthly reviews to determine the necessity of keeping adults in segregation under the safekeeping law. Some lawmakers and advocates believe more changes are still necessary, and some call for the elimination of safekeeping altogether.

The *Virginian-Pilot* [reported](#) that the family of Daiyaan Longmire, a man from Virginia Beach who had been serving time at Indian Creek Correctional Center in Chesapeake, won \$100,000 in a wrongful death lawsuit against the Virginia Department of Corrections (VA DOC). Longmire, who had a documented history of bipolar disorder, ADHD, depression, and anxiety, hanged himself in his solitary confinement cell on November 8, 2014, after he informed the corrections officer on duty that he would harm himself. The lawsuit alleges that the officer did nothing to help, and the surveillance video disproved the officers claim that she conducted a check on Longmire. The involved corrections officer subsequently left the department, but the VA DOC continues to deny negligence or liability.

The *Daily News Journal* of Tennessee [reported](#) that the Rutherford County Commission agreed to settle a class-action lawsuit filed against the local juvenile detention center for holding a developmentally disabled 15-year-old boy in solitary confinement. The lawsuit claims that placing the child in solitary confinement without regard to his possible mental illness violated his 8th and 14th Amendment rights. Since the ACLU filed the lawsuit in 2016, new regulations have been passed prohibiting punitive solitary confinement for juveniles, but the settlement will become official after a final court ruling.

The New Jersey Parents Caucus (NJPC) and the New Jersey Youth Justice Initiative (NJYJI) released a [report](#) this week documenting the experiences of youth in adult correctional facilities in the state of New Jersey. While the 2015 Comprehensive Juvenile Justice Reform Bill banned the use of disciplinary solitary confinement in juvenile detention facilities, former Governor Chris Christie vetoed legislation in 2016 that would have prohibited the use of solitary on children held in adult facilities. The NJCP report based its data on surveys collected and analyzed from juveniles held in adult prisons, concluding that solitary confinement psychologically damages youth

as well as adults and exacerbates prior mental illnesses. The report also found drastic racial disparity in the number of Black youth held in solitary and the length of solitary confinement stays for Black and Hispanic youth. The NJCP report calls for a ban on the use of solitary confinement on children in adult prisons.

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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