

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/03/15/california-prison-conditions-driving-prisoners-to-suicide/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | March 15, 2013

A court-appointed consultant, forensic psychiatrist Dr. Raymond Patterson, has [reported](#) that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has failed to effectively combat the large and escalating problem of suicides in the California prison system. According to reporting by KPCC, Patterson despondently asserted that his making any additional recommendations would be a further waste of time and effort, as recommendations over many years have gone unheeded.

The report comes as U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton is preparing a decision on whether or not California's mental, mental health, and dental care must continue to be monitored by federal courts. In August 2012, then-CDCR Secretary Matthew Cate issued a plan to end federal oversight of California prison health care. My goal is to end federal court oversight of medical, mental health and dental care by next year, Cate [said](#). Though Cate resigned in October, his enthusiasm for lifting federal court oversight has been [championed](#) by California Governor Jerry Brown. Brown has argued that California has made significant leaps in improving prison health care and addressing overcrowding.

According to reporting by the *Los Angeles Times*, the March 13 report by Patterson and five other experts reviewed 15 of 32 suicides in 2012. The report notes that prisoners housed in segregation units, Administrative Segregation Units and Security Housing Units, have a 33 times higher chance of suicide. According to [Amnesty International](#), between 2006 and 2010, there was an average of 34 suicides in the California prison system a year, with 42 percent occurring in segregation units.

According to the *LA Times* [reporting](#), 13 of the 15 deaths showed some form of inadequate assessment, treatment or intervention. Three of the 15 prisoners had already undergone rigor mortis, meaning hours had gone by from the time of their death to the time they were found. Further, the California prison suicide rate of nearly 24 per 100,000 exceeds the national state prison average of 16 per 100,000.

The report comes weeks after [news](#) that the state of California had suppressed a report from its own consultant warning that California's prison suicide-watch practices encouraged inmate deaths. In 2011, suicide prevention expert Lindsay Hayes found that the conditions of California's suicide watch units contributed to suicides. The units, described by the *LA Times* as dim, dirty, airless cells with unsanitized mattresses on the floor, were inadequately operated. In reviewing 25 suicides, Hayes found that seven prisoners killed themselves within hours of release from suicide watch. Calling the suicide watch practices anti-therapeutic, he found that in 17 of the suicides there were notable lapses in care, including infrequent checking in on prisoners and failure to conduct CPR.

Solitary Watch is aware of and has reported on five suicides in the California prison systems segregation units.

On September 16th, 2011, [Johnny Owen Vick](#), 30, committed suicide in the Pelican Bay State Prison Administrative Segregation Unit. Vicks family has told Solitary Watch that he had long had mental health problems, and had been incarcerated for over twenty years.

Four days later, [Armando Cruz](#), 28, committed suicide at California State Prison, Sacramento's Psychiatric Services Unit. Cruz, incarcerated as a 17 year old, had entered the prison system with a diagnosis of schizophrenia following an attack on a police officer. Over the course of a decade, he would spend years in solitary confinement largely following disruptive incidents seemingly instigated by his heavily documented mental health problems.

On October 24th, 2011, [Alex Machado](#) committed suicide in Pelican Bay State Prison's Administrative Segregation Unit. Validated as a gang associate in 2010, he was transferred to Pelican Bay. The man who was once known for his intelligence and helping other prisoners file legal documents gradually deteriorated in isolation. Hearing voices and perceiving visual hallucinations at times, he attempted suicide in June 2011. Nevertheless, he remained in isolation until the day of his death. Fellow prisoners on his cell told California Prison Focus that Machado had been screaming for help on the day of his death.

In November 2011, the San Francisco Bay View [reported](#) that Calipatria State Prison Administrative Segregation Unit prisoner Hozel Blanchard had been found dead in his cell. Blanchard, who had participated in the widespread hunger strikes protesting against long-term solitary confinement and demanding a litany of reforms, had reportedly feared for his life before his death.

In August 2012, Corcoran State Prison SHU prisoner [Armando Morales](#) was found hanging in his cell. A Watts, California native,

Morales had been incarcerated since he was a teenager. He had spent at least six years in the SHU.

For more on the widespread problem of suicide in prison and solitary confinement units, click [here](#).

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

<http://solitarywatch.com/?s=Alan+CYA>

@April S.

2007 he was Id say in his mid 40s. Had been in isolation over a decade in several of Calif's worst prisons. He was non-violent and not a gang member.

He didn't want us to visit or write because he said the guards would be abusive after our mother's visits because she would get in their face. Even walked in on the Governor.

My mom, Victor and Victor's father, my step-father all died within a year of each other so I don't know the exact date. You can read my tribute to him by clicking the link above.

That's so sad. Thanks for the article.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2013/03/26/175283008/maybe-isolation-not-loneliness-shortens-life>

Both social isolation and loneliness appeared initially to be associated with a greater risk of dying, he says. But it was really the isolation which was more important.

It's not even possible for inmates in the hole to alleviate their isolation and loneliness.

Some things are necessary for life.

As William Blake an English poet, wrote:

The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship.

I work with this every day: We have a couple of folks that are challenged that we have residing under our care. It is not easy, dealing with folks that are challenged, however it can be done with dignity. I have always believed in Community Care under a Managed Situation for almost all challenged folks.. It is an effort, but a wonderful way to assist those in need..

Sorry to hear about your loss Alan. How old was he? How long ago did it happen?

I agree Russ. It can be very challenging.

@April S

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/collegeprose/2013/03/25/college-behind-bars-how-educating-prisoners-pays-off/>

How Educating Prisoners Pays Off

I am also sorry about your brother. As I previously wrote above:

Since my own little brother is one of these statistics I find it sickening to read this and this:

I've seen minds slipping down the slope of sanity, descending into insanity, and I've been terrified that I would end up like the guys around me that have cracked and become nuts. It's a sad thing to watch a human being go insane before your eyes because he can't handle the pressure that the box exerts on the mind, but it is sadder still to see the spirit shaken from a soul. And it is more disastrous.

Sometimes the prison guards find them hanging and blue; sometimes their necks get broken when they jump from their bed, the sheet tied around the neck that's also wrapped around the grate covering the light in the ceiling snapping taut with a pop.

I've seen the spirit leaving men in SHU and have witnessed the results.

The box is a place like no other place on planet Earth.

Written by William Blake

@Russ

Again I agree. I previously noted on here the reason given on the Kirkbride Buildings, which were famous for their mental asylums, web site

<http://www.kirkbridebuildings.com/>

for a sudden asylum building boom in the nineteenth century was the stresses placed on the public during the Long Depression, previously called the Great depression (1873 to 1896).

Placing so many adult citizens into Mental Asylums left many children unsupervised so orphan asylums and reform schools such as Preston School of Industry (where I did time) and M.S.T.S. were created for these mostly poor and neglected children of European immigrants of the era. Mostly Irish I might add.

A welcome by-product of both these asylums and reform schools was the jobs they brought to such remote communities as Ione, CA and Red Wing, MN.

One can sense the invisible hand of capitalism at work in this early history, and see how the poor bore the greatest burden of criminal disfranchisement.

Profit was and still remains the goal of such institutions. I have found that there is a much stronger link between the building of asylums and prisons for they share a common history of abuse.

In 1946 Life magazine did an expose titled Bedlam 1946 on the abusive conditions found inside this nation's asylums.

Excerpts:

Abuse and the punitive use of restraints, overcrowding, underfeeding and dilapidation might all be condoned if only these hospitals achieved a reasonable standard of treatment and cure. But the fact is that the vast majority of them fall far below the achievements of the far better hospitals and far, far below what could be achieved if cure rather than mere custody were the primary objective.

Given the fact the people of any state will rally, to put an end to concentration camps that masquerade as hospitals and to make cure rather than incarceration the goal of their mental institutions.

Robert Merton called this goal displacement a common phenomenon within large bureaucracies as the original goal of the bureaucracy is displaced with the goal of continued funding.

As a result of Life's expose The National Mental Health Foundation was founded and it became an impetus toward deinstitutionalization. One result of this is prisons have now become the largest mental health care provider (I use that term loosely) where many if not most of the mentally ill end up in isolation units.

Thanks Russ. And I agree. People get tossed in jail and forgotten about. I believe a lot of areas in the prison system are corrupt. How about trying to help these people become better people. Obviously these people had to have had a rough life to end up in prison. Maybe if someone got to the bottom of it to help them through it, we could make a difference in the world. It just saddens me.

@April S: Sorry for your loss. The fact is that Mental Health in this country is in the toilet. They have the worse record and a bogus academic record of any group in the US.. Their answer is to put you on a drug and let you vegetate. Just think about this, how many people, that you know or knew, that got well under Mental Health care? The fact is that they do not have any idea what they are doing. How many people did they put in the street when they closed all the State Hospitals around the Country? Then they never to this day put Community Managed Care into effect. The system has a bunch of nut bags administrating the Mental Health System; they all have phony degrees and get high wages for doing nothing, not all, but the vast majority. They sit around and go to meeting talking to each other and spending tax payer money. You study any mental health place in the US for six months track their clients and you'll see that they do nothing but fail, their clients and us taxpayers. While these poor people end up in the prison system, due to the failure of the Mental Health System.

I remember the soul being ripped up like paper over infinite time. You're never human again. You talk and walk like they tell you, but the inside is gone forever. Once you see that you can't unsee it. I try to wonder why how moving weed when I was a kid was worth all that pain to society. The truth is society just wants stuff and it doesn't care what it does for progress. You all know it ain't right but the check gets signed.

I am Armando Morales's sister. Never once in any of the letters he wrote me did he indicate that his mental health was deteriorating. He sounded normal. He became a little more spiritual but never did I sense he was losing his mind. To this day I still do not know why he

did this to himself. I do know there is some abuse that goes on by the guards. This needs to stop! I just have to know that my brother is finally free and not suffering anymore. He was a strong man. May he be resting in peace.

@Alan: Ill try to read it; I am swamped with work; and in the mist of publishing two books.. I noted the remark about the code of silence in the street; something that no longer exist. As you can see with the boston boys, they all run for the deal; I would never trust a soul today.. I have partners that go back over fifty-years with me. the only folks I do trust in life for they went to the wall with me. (just a note for you) I know Manning and all those assholes; their actions screwed many a convict, in the prison movement by their bull-shit They cost us big time in Mass., back in the day Phoney piece of garbage. He is about as much a warrior for the people as I am a saintly persons that can walk on water; they were nothing but thieves and robbers out for themselves with a revolutionary bull-shit line Pure crap.. He has his little groupies a bunch of nut bags.. Not a one of them can look in the mirror a see who they really are

@Russ

I think youll find this article interesting as an ex-numbers man.

And it keeps on keeping on.

<http://www.washingtonian.com/articles/people/the-informant/index.php>

The Informant

It was one of the worst killing sprees in Washington history. The defendants stood accused of killing five young people and wounding eight. The case against them hinged on the testimony of their accomplice Nathaniel Simms. What made him break the code of the streets and help send his friends to prison?By Kevin Charles Redmon

In the Washington Highlands neighborhood of Southeast DC, up against the Maryland line, everyone plays his numbers at the market at Sixth and Chesapeake. The old drunks troll for change, and kids who never learned better call the Korean owner Jackie Chan. Out on the corner, the hustle and grind never stop, and every so often, because of a fake-diamond bracelet or for no reason at all, a spate of violence rips through the neighborhood like a tornado through a cornfield.

Sixth and Chesapeake is where Nathaniel Dwight Simms used to hustle cocaine, marijuana, a little ecstasy before March 2010, when he got tangled up in a bad thing, picked up an AK-47, climbed into the back of a minivan, and, along with some friends, gunned down a group of innocent kids on South Capitol Street.

A readers comment:

tvesbrink

Chilling story. I guess as a human I want to find meaning, resolution or somehow rationalize any part of this but I just cant. They should live the rest of their lives in prison, in solitary. Death would be a mercy for them.

@Russ

I know exactly what you mean about having to live with violent predators. I am more in line with you then you might believe.

When I attempted to help those being victimized I was under threats of death. After I went toe to toe with the ring leader over 80 weapons were found and he admitted planning to attack every white in the unit with me as there grand prize.

I believe that prison is a cruel gauntlet with one side lined with rouge guards and the other with predatory inmates. These two adversarial groups, consciously or unconsciously, have colluded together to met out societys punishment.

If one is lucky they will reemerge on the other side with a new appreciation of what it takes to do your time in the middle.

One charismatic leader can do more harm than any lone violent inmate for he controls an army. The thing is only a few articles have generated such hatred as Blakes.

My last article on here.

Oh I have never been a predator I used drugs and fought off predators.

My last article on here also read my comments here and on Jewells story a few articles down from Blakes.

<http://solitarywatch.com/2012/12/30/voices-from-solitary-haunted-by-memorys-ghosts/>

Much respect!

@Alan and others who are reading my comments. 1.) I would like everyone out of segregation units.2.) I want all prisoners protected from violence by any other person in prison whether prisoner or guard. 3.) I would like all prisoners to become productive community members. 4.) However, as an ex-convict myself, classified a career criminal, anti-social psychopathic individual who did seven behind the wall and another 20 on probation or parole, there is a reality factor for our greater community at large and the community of prisoners wherein one is confined 5.) The safety of the community must be paramount in my mind A difficult situation when everyone in isolation is innocent by the standard of friends and family 6.) My own never believed I was as bad as I was Even though I explained to them my bad acts.. Mrs. Carmichaels boy Russ was innocent to her, no matter what anyone said When in fact, at one time, I was no better than the worst of predators.. (evaluation of myself, looking in the mirror, knowing my own capability) 7.) You tell me, what right does the administrator of a correction system have in placing a dangerous, un-remorseful killer, doing time, who has done bad acts while serving a sentence for bad acts, beside or in a community wherein I or anyone else has to live with that threat? Doing time is bad enough,

having to live with the constant threat of violence, is not conducive for any positive change. 8.) Therefor we have classification, good or bad 9.) Everyone has loved one; however, I have learned over my fifty years, to remove the emotion, I feel toward individuals so that I may attempt to asses where they are and where they are going in their quest for change 10.) Even with my own children and family members 11.) So when you are looking at Solitary, a torture by anyones standard; and the individuals you are looking to integrate; you need to think of the people who are where you are going to place this person back with; you need to think about, what right, have you or he to place others at risk. When you already know, that this person has continually preyed on others? What right, do you or that person you want released, have to posse any type of threat to anothers safety, that is the issues you folks are talking about..

Hi You guys stated it so well* I cry every time this site. There are so many men & women that are not monsters, they like these men had mental issues that did not get cared for before finding themselves locked in a box. CDC is pushing the female inmates now also into bad overcrowded conditions, where those with sever problems are housed with the general population. & Others are being put into AD-Seg Units for lack of any where else to place them. The Men in Our Government are the monisters. I do not know how they sleep at night. God watch over all of us that this could happen to also* Sal God bless You for being there to expose this. Gellybean*

I absolutely agree: We as a community are no better than the individuals that broke our laws. In fact, we as a community are worse for we are committing crimes against humanity, as a group, under the color of law, calling ourselves concerned citizens. For many, many, years I have said, they are worse than all the prisoners put together. And, I email 1000s of agencies asking why these judges have not been arrested.

Well said Carl & Russ

Since my little brother is one of these statistics I find it sicking to read this and this:

Ive seen minds slipping down the slope of sanity, descending into insanity, and Ive been terrified that I would end up like the guys around me that have cracked and become nuts. Its a sad thing to watch a human being go insane before your eyes because he cant handle the pressure that the box exerts on the mind, but it is sadder still to see the spirit shaken from a soul. And it is more disastrous.

Sometimes the prison guards find them hanging and blue; sometimes their necks get broken when they jump from their bed, the sheet tied around the neck thats also wrapped around the grate covering the light in the ceiling snapping taut with a pop.

Ive seen the spirit leaving men in SHU and have witnessed the results.

The box is a place like no other place on planet Earth.

By William Blake

.

The fact is 80% of those in prison could be on and honor system like the English prisons.. You could have 10 or 15 staff for 500 prisoners This incarceration for small drug charges are all bull and drunk drivers We have a system of the bracelet were one person could monitor 100 Please the system is bloated with political jobs and uncaring individuals that would just and do turn their backs on the need of a prisoner male or female Most os the people who run prisons are incompetent and are political hacks They have little interest in the public and only care about their pay check

Truthful revelations and reporting; seen this with my own eyes and will admit DOC everywhere are closing their eyes on this problem. Time delays in understaffed admin seg units is main reason for lack of services availability in all areas that include security, medical, mental health, food and conditions of confinement provisions not met timely, per policy and then reacted to cover up mistakes and blunders. The concept has grown to such exponentially expansive proportions it has exceeded its span of control to provide a safe and secure environment everywhere in isolation and control units.

You can see some of the work we do on this issue at <http://www.nlhome.org> Robert Dellelo is our representative on these particular issues; we work in coalition with the national Religious Campaign Against torture and many other groups.. Also our TV show Struggle for Justice which we produce

Now this is a horror story. To have these things happen in our prisons, tells everyone the level of concern our citizens have for our prisoners; whatever your crime the horror of inhuman treatment by us, as a society, tells where our values lie If we do not care about the human condition, then, where is our right, to set any form of punishment on anyone? If we, in our prison system, exert the same type of crimes on those held in confinement, that are committed by the people we are holding as punishment, what does that say to the whole community? To me, it says, we as a community are no better than the individuals that broke our laws. In fact, we as a community are worse for we are committing crimes against humanity, as a group, under the color of law, calling ourselves concerned citizens. This makes no sense to me.. How do all these correctional personal get away with mis-treatment and total abuse to the point of killing without us turning our backs and allowing it to happen? As we pay them huge salaries for their abuse to others? Why arent those predators in prison themselves?

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News