

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/ohios-children-will-now-be-free-isolation>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Children in Ohio's youth prisons will finally be free from extreme isolation and seclusion. After youths suffered collectively through thousands of hours of being locked in isolation, the Ohio Department of Youth Services has now agreed to dramatically reduce the conditions under which seclusion is allowed and the duration of seclusion. Children suffering from mental health disorders were some of the most affected by this practice of seclusion.

The extreme seclusion of children in Ohio received national attention when it came to light that the [state locked up children in isolation for 1,964 hours](#) between April and September of 2013.

[Children locked in isolation suffer](#) extreme harms. Many children who are secluded have mental health disorders. Ohio has locked up juveniles in isolation repeatedly, causing children to physically harm themselves, experience psychological damage, and even attempt suicide.

This month, the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the seclusion of child prisoners, particularly those suffering from mental health disorders.

In December, the ACLU of Ohio launched an administrative rules campaign calling for a [ban on the solitary confinement](#) (referred to as seclusion) of children in detention.

[ACLU's National Prison Project](#), several child advocates, and hundreds of our members and supporters submitted comments to the Ohio DYS calling for a ban. [The ACLU of Ohio also submitted a letter](#) calling on them to amend their rules and ban seclusion, not only because of its dangerous effects, but because it is excessively used and has no constructive or positive educational impact on children. Despite [these efforts](#), more pressure was needed.

In March, the U.S. Department of Justice [filed a restraining order](#) against the Ohio DYS to end seclusion of children with mental health needs.

On Wednesday, May 21, 2014, the Ohio DYS and the U.S. Department of Justice reached a [settlement agreement](#), to [dramatically reduce, and eventually eliminate](#) the use of seclusion in Ohio's youth detention facilities. The agreement includes a [set of strategies](#) to reduce violence and improve the response to violence in DYS facilities. The strategies include actions and deadlines for the Ohio DYS, such as conducting more mental health assessments and allowing children in isolation to participate more in core programming. DYS will also enact measures to reduce the accumulation of seclusion time. A large focus of the agreement is on children with mental health disorders.

Juvenile detention facilities have a duty to protect the children in their custody and care. Seclusion and isolation not only harms children, but undermines the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile justice system. This settlement is a positive step towards helping Ohio's children grow into adults and reenter society.

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