

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | July 15, 2019

As *NorthJersey.com* [reported](#), Governor Phil Murphy signed the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act, hailed as the strongest legislation restricting solitary in the nation, by ACLU of New Jersey Executive Director Amol Sinha. The bill, taking effect next year, will ban solitary confinement for longer than 20 consecutive days and prohibit the isolation of youth, elderly people, pregnant women, and people with disabilities. Data from 2017 found that over 5 percent of New Jersey's prison population more than 1,000 people is subjected to solitary confinement. J. Amos Caley of the New Jersey Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement [said](#), The voices of survivors of solitary confinement, and their strength in summoning up some of the worse moments of their lives to stop the routine use of prolonged isolation, have been the moral ballast responsible for making these historic restrictions law.

The *New Yorker* published an [article](#) highlighting the Solitary Watch-sponsored project Photo Requests from Solitary (PRFS), which connects the vivid imaginations of people held in isolation to volunteer photographers on the outside willing to fulfill their requests. Regrets, anguish, and hope emanated from the handwriting, the author wrote. The descriptions were abundant and precise, sometimes ecstatic images that the inmates assembled from language long before they were made visual. One man requested to see motion. He said, I've been in solitary for twenty-three years and three days today. It's like living in a still-life painting I'd like to see things moving. Perhaps traffic at night, lights shining and the trails from lights whizzing past. PRFS was born in collaboration with a campaign to shutter Tamms Supermax Prison in Illinois and has since received hundreds of requests from people in solitary across Illinois, New York, California, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

Great Britain's Channel 4 News published an extensive [interview](#) with Albert Woodfox, author of the book *Solitary* and member of the Angola 3 who spent nearly 45 years in solitary in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Woodfox spoke about his life: growing up as an African American boy in the South, the retaliation he faced in prison for his involvement in the Black Panther Party including getting framed for the murder of a guard, being a father unable to hold his daughter during his 50 years incarcerated, and why he has never stopped fighting for a more just society. Woodfox said the biggest challenge to surviving solitary is not to lose your sanity. I've seen so many men go insane, and I've seen men cut their throat, cut their wrists, cut their genitalia, trying to force the administration to let them out of solitary. But Woodfox said he and the other Angola 3 members turned their solitary cells into schools. We educated ourselves and turned those cells into universities, debate halls, and law clinics.

13WMAZ [reported](#) the death of Gerald Florence, Jr. last Sunday at Hancock State Prison, the third apparent suicide this year in a Central Georgia prison. Shirley Patton wants to know what happened to her son. Nobody would talk to me or tell me anything, she said. They just said I wasn't allowed to come into the prison. Patton said that her son was in solitary confinement at the time of his death and, He was on strip search. He couldn't have clothes or anything. If he had no clothes or anything, then why? What happened? she asked. While the corrections department is not investigating Florence's death as a murder, the coroner said he had a cut on his neck and an autopsy report is currently being conducted.

*Think Progress* [reported](#) that United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called the inhumane conditions in detention centers at the southern U.S. border undignified and alarming. A report released by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General found overcrowding, flu outbreaks, lack of clean clothing, overuse of solitary confinement, and reports of nooses in detainee cells in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities, where migrant men, women, and children are held. While the Homeland Security Secretary denied the report findings, Bachelet said, Detaining a child even for short periods under good conditions can have a serious impact on their health and development consider the damage being done every day by allowing this alarming situation to continue.

The *Atlantic* partnered with filmmaker Sylvia Johnson to produce [Luz's Story](#) as part of the series The Horrors of ICE's Trans Pod. The short documentary tells the story of Luz, a transgender woman who fled Honduras after being targeted and shot by gang members for her gender identity. Upon arrival to the U.S., Luz was sent to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility Cibola County Correctional Center in New Mexico, where she spent two months in solitary confinement. Luz said, What solitary produces [is] anxiety. Because they lock you in by yourself in a room where there is nothing to do but sleep. They throw the food through a little window as if they were throwing it to an animal And when it's time for yard, they take you out like a dog in a cage with a ball. I was desperate and

wanted to hurt myself. Some of the guards laughed at me. Luz has since been released on temporary parole.

*The Hill* [published](#) an interview with reporter Aviva Stahl, who has called for greater transparency around the use of solitary in federal prisons, specifically the use of Special Administrative Measures (SAMs). Stahl recently exposed the brutal force-feeding of men held under SAMs at the U.S. Penitentiary Maximum ADX facility in Florence, Colorado. One man, Mohammed Salameh, convicted of terrorism charges, spent eleven years in severe isolation and endured over 200 episodes of force-feeding during his several hunger strikes against the SAMs restrictions. Salameh said that he was put on SAMs after the 9/11 crackdown but was never given a reason for the heightened restrictions. People are placed on SAMs with the sole discretion of the attorney general with no judicial oversight, she said. Perhaps if we have more transparency about how SAMs operated or what the DOJ was using as a marker of dangerousness, it would be a different story.

*Sixty Inches from Center* [interviewed](#) Joseph Dole, jailhouse lawyer and co-founder of Parole Illinois, who is currently incarcerated at Stateville Prison and spent nearly a decade in solitary at the now-closed Tamms Supermax Prison. Dole spoke of his time in isolation as both boring and crazy. Dole was approached to write a journal about life in solitary, and he said, When you're in isolation like that, the days were just the same thing over and over again. For those three weeks not a lot happened, but a lot of crazy stuff was happening down there pretty regularly. People were cutting themselves, trying to kill themselves, or killing themselves. Orange Crush was coming in and tearing up our cells, macing people. Excerpts from his journal were published in *Solitary Watch's Hell is a Very Small Place*, as well as the *Mississippi Review*. Dole recently graduated from Northeastern Illinois University, but he continues to work for fair and inclusive parole because without my freedom, he said, it just doesn't feel like something I can rejoice about.

Valerie Kiebal 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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