

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/05/07/transgender-immigrant-detainees-locked-in-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | May 7, 2012

Today's Advocate has an [excellent article](#) by Andrew Harmon, dissecting the abuses faced by transgender detainees in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. It begins with the story of a transgender woman who spent eight months in solitary confinement in a Virginia jail:

A few days after Christmas last year, Ruby Corado, a longtime transgender activist in Washington, D.C., received a telephone call while watching late-night TV. The number on her iPhone was from Rappahannock Regional Jail, about an hour's drive south of the nation's capital in Stafford, Va. Rappahannock is [one of more than 200 facilities nationwide](#) that contracts with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to house those awaiting a judge's decision on whether they can remain in the United States or will be deported back to their home country. On any given day, about 32,000 people are held in detention, many for violating immigration law a civil, not criminal, offense.

Weak and distraught, the transgender woman calling Corado at 11 p.m. from Rappahannock was one of them. Her name was Kripicia, and she had been held for eight months in what ICE calls administrative segregation solitary confinement, in non-bureaucratic terms. A native of El Salvador, she was arrested in early 2011 for failure to pay a cab.

Kripicia had spent a minimum 22 hours per day in a tiny cell with little access to recreation or other people. This was not because she had defied any jail rules: It was for her own good, for her safety, she was told by officers. Kripicia's cell was located in a special unit of the jail usually reserved for male sex offenders. She was told that it would be easier for guards to watch over her in this smaller area.

*Ruby, I just want to die. I'm going crazy,* Kripicia told Corado on the phone that evening. *But if I have to die, I want to go back to my country. I can't die in here.*

*Promise me you're not going to think those thoughts,* Corado replied. *Come on, work with me on this. Promise me. Just give it one more day.*

It's hard, you know? What do I really tell these people in detention? Corado said through tears during a recent conversation at Casa Ruby, her soon-to-open Latino LGBT community center near Howard University. Segregation is inhuman. And how they're treated, how they're abused? It's inexcusable. Even if they've done something wrong, you want the best for these people. But I've never seen a case of a transgender detainee who was actually treated like a human being.

The article goes on to describe how transgender immigrants like Kripicia are among the worst victims of a turf war going on between the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security (which includes ICE), under which DHS insists it is not bound by laws and regulations concerning the treatment of federal prisoners. Key among these laws is the Prison Rape Elimination Act, which is meant to address the epidemic of sexual assaults in U.S. prisons. Prison rape, like solitary, disproportionately affects transgender inmates.

The article is well worth [reading in full](#), and details the efforts of advocates even the new Public Advocate within ICE to keep solitary confinement from being the default position when it comes to dealing with transgender detainees. The piece ends with another story of isolation:

Rosalba Davis [of the group Immigration Equality] worked with a transgender woman named Dulce from Guanajuato, Mexico, who originally fled to the U.S. in the 1990s following a sexual assault. Dulce has the effervescence of an Almodóvar film actress, yet is shy when speaking about her time in detention. She had been transferred to Rappahannock following an arrest for shoplifting shoes at a local K-Mart. Upon arrival, Dulce was put into an isolation cell (*el hoyo*, or the hole) for six days with nothing but a pair of sheets and a thin, wet mattress thrown onto the floor. I remember asking a female sergeant, Why did you put me here, in the hole? It's the place for punishment. What did I do? Dulce recalled. She told me they didn't know where else they could put me.

Dulce was transferred to the same area that Kripicia had been held, the one designated for male sex offenders. She waited four months before her first court appearance and eventually spent eight months at the facility. CAIR Coalition, a local immigrant advocacy group, found out about Dulce's case, which was soon taken up by Davis. When I found out that Dulce was being held with sex offenders, I was

not sure what to do about it, she said. It all seemed so backwards to me.

Dulce had little interaction with her fellow detainees, but some conversations she did have scared her, as she recounted to the court last year. I have not felt safe here and several detainees have made harassing comments, she wrote. When New York State passed gay marriage in July [2011], we were watching the TV coverage and one of the detainees said that he wanted to be like Franco and make them all disappear. He was telling me he wanted to kill all the gay people, including me. I try to ignore these comments and keep the peace but sometimes I feel unsafe and scared here.

The officer handling Dulce's case seemed perpetually confused about her particular circumstances, according to Davis. Over the course of my representation, he had very little patience, Davis said of the ICE officer and his handling of Dulce's requests, which included hormone therapy and a chaplain visit after Dulce learned that her mother had died (both were denied). He even hung up on me once when I challenged his decision to continue to detain her after the immigration court granted her relief.

Absent safe facilities for transgender individuals, advocates have called for alternatives to detention in appropriate cases. Research shows that putting trans detainees on ankle bracelet monitoring results in significant savings for the government \$14 per day compared to \$100 or more a day for the cost of detention, according to Homeland Security's [own figures](#).

Nobody should be subjected to these kinds of abuses, and people need to hear these stories, said Harper Jean Tobin, director of policy for the National Center for Transgender Equality. I think there has been an increasing meanness in our country toward people who are undocumented. Unfortunately, that certainly had an effect on the progress we have and haven't made in securing better treatment in detention.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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

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PBS Frontline reports:

DHS to Adopt New Rules on Immigration Detention Abuse

Immigrants detained in facilities run by the Department of Homeland Security are a step closer to having similar protections from sexual abuse as inmates in the U.S. prison system.

So here is what they can expect. The numbers:

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/mar/24/prison-rape-and-government/?pagination=false>

More than 216,600 people were sexually abused in prisons and jails and, in the case of at least 17,100 of them, in juvenile detention. Overall, that's almost six hundred people a day twenty-five an hour.

Overall, most victims were abused not by other inmates but by corrections staff: agents of our government, paid with our taxes, whose job it is to keep inmates safe.

All the numbers we have cited count people who were abused, not instances of abuse. People raped behind bars cannot escape their attackers, though. They must live in constant fear, their trauma renewed every time they see their assailants. Between half and two thirds of those who claim sexual abuse in adult facilities say it happened more than once; previous BJS studies suggest that victims endure an average of three to five attacks each per year.

The NY Time reports:

North Carolina: Warden and Guard Suspended

By ROBBIE BROWN

Published: December 4, 2012

The warden and a guard at Sampson Correctional Institute in Clinton were suspended on Tuesday after inmates reported that guards had forced them to rub hot sauce on their genitals, kiss deadly snakes and imitate sex acts. The Department of Public Safety said the warden, Lafayette Hall, and the guard, David P. Jones, were being suspended with pay while state officials investigated. In June, six inmates sent a letter to the Federal District Court in Greensboro complaining that the prison staff had forced them to perform humiliating acts as entertainment.

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P.O. Box 11374

Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

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