

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | June 8, 2012

The Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, chaired by Illinois Democrat Dick Durbin, has announced that it will hold a hearing later this month on solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails—the first-ever Congressional hearing on this subject. The subcommittee released the following information today:

Reassessing Solitary Confinement: The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences

Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

Date: Tuesday, June 19, 2012

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Dirksen Senate Office Building Room 226

Description: U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), the Senate's Assistant Majority Leader, will chair a hearing on the human rights, fiscal, and public safety consequences of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers. This is the first-ever Congressional hearing on solitary confinement. Over the last several decades, the United States has witnessed an explosion in the use of solitary confinement for federal, state, and local prisoners and detainees. The hearing will explore the psychological and psychiatric impact on inmates during and after their imprisonment, the higher costs of running solitary housing units, the human rights issues surrounding the use of isolation, and successful state reforms in this area.

This hearing is open to the public. The list of witnesses will be announced on a future date.

Chairman Durbin invites interested advocates and experts to submit written testimony to be included in the hearing record. Statements should be less than 10 pages, and should be emailed to Nicholas Deml at Nicholas_Deml@judiciary-dem.senate.gov as early as possible, but no later than Friday, June 15, 2012 at 5:00 PM.

Senator Dick Durbin is Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights. The Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights was formed by merging the Constitution Subcommittee and the Human Rights and the Law Subcommittee, which Senator Durbin previously chaired. The Subcommittee has jurisdiction over all constitutional issues, and all legislation and policy related to civil rights, civil liberties and human rights. The Ranking Member of the Subcommittee is Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

Advocates are urging colleagues to submit statements and attend the hearings. David Fathi, who heads the ACLU's National Prison Project, called the hearing a huge opportunity for those who support reform to make their voices heard.

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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All people who claim that they are concerned about our communities should be very concerned about this issue. People who go to jail have demonstrated that they have a problem adjusting to the laws of our society, if they are not treated properly more likely they will come out worse and be even more destructive to our communities. It should be the intentions of correction to help the inmates not make them worse which is what happens when a person is placed in solitary confinement.

Solitary confinement has a well documented negative impact on mental health and wellbeing and may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, particularly when used for a prolonged time

There is unequivocal evidence that solitary confinement has a profound impact on health and wellbeing, particularly for those with pre-existing mental health disorders, and that it may also actively cause mental illness. The extent of psychological damage varies and will depend on individual factors (e.g. personal background and pre-existing health problems), environmental factors (e.g. physical conditions and provisions), regime (e.g. time out of cell, degree of human contact), the context of isolation (e.g. punishment, own protection, voluntary/ non voluntary, political/criminal) and its duration.

There is remarkable consistency in research findings on the health effects of solitary confinement throughout the decades. These have mostly demonstrated negative health effects, with studies reporting no negative effects being few and far between, and virtually no study reporting positive effects.

It is imperative that consideration of the vast amount of research on this practice be reviewed in determining continued use. Additionally, an in-depth understanding of the impact on the communities to which they return must be taken into account, as 90% of them return with limited support of successful transition.

http://solitaryconfinement.org/uploads/sourcebook_web.pdf

This is so inhumane when I was locked in a single cell I was fed a small breakfast, soup for lunch and left over dinner from chow that was ground into what we called Mystery Mounds or Buffalo Balls. They were so bad nobody could eat it. I had lost 20 lbs. in 3 weeks. My bed roll was taken away at 6am for weeks at a time to only be returned in the evening hours. The practice of solitary confinement needs to stop. Showers were only every other day only when the CO felt like it some times a week would go by and I had gall stones it took them a month to take me only cuz someone felt compassion for me to get me to the hospital. Thank God my stones were going gangrenous. I was left for dead and I was in a M.O. cell. Medical Observation Cell and stayed in the hospital 3 weeks for the surgery. Such a rotten place to be left in a cell sick with no attention.

When I was placed in SHU as a 21 yr. old it had a very big impact on my life. I was to be placed in the hole but because of overflow they put me in the SMU for SHU overflow. They had placed me with some who were witches and were satanic, something I will never forget. But the reality of the stay was no mattress, cement floors, food that was mush and was not worthy of being called food. Treated like animals, very demeaning and disrespectful. If you didn't have a very strong mind and heart I can see how this can affect a being for the rest of their lives. To have negativity towards anyone or thing. This SHU/SMU is inhumane and should be stopped. Of course if you are medically ill I believe they should be housed differently unless the prison made them like that.

Praying for reform, and for the powers that be, listen and make changes.

I will definitely write my viewpoint as a former deputy warden in a Special Management Unit in Florence and identify and address issues that I think are detrimental and contributory to the demise of human beings locked away for prolonged periods of time and held under conditions that are not constitutionally sound in my honest opinion as a former correctional administrator now having the opportunity to witness, observe, react and understand the elements of solitary confinement. I hope all family members will take the time to write how this concept has impacted their loved ones and how they have been treated and changed over the years of incarceration inside a SHU or SMU.

Now is the time for all good men and women to take a step forward and share their experiences in solitary confinement with Congress. Don't be shy, every word written or said is another stepping stone to a better and more focused picture of this practice that has long term effects when abused.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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