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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | November 5, 2019

[According](#) to the *Crime Report*, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) released a report last week that found an increase in the use of solitary confinement across the New York prison system. The total number of disciplinary solitary sanctions has actually increased, from 37,600 in 2015 to 38,249 in 2018, according to the report, even though the state signed on to a settlement in 2015, agreeing to reduce the use of solitary. The report found that the increase has transpired under the name of Keeplock Sanctions, which isolates a person for up to 23 hours a day in a bare cell the size of a small elevator. The NYCLU calls for the state to pass the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement, which would restrict the use of solitary in all forms, including keeplock, to a maximum of fifteen consecutive days.

Providence Journal [reported](#) that the ACLU and Disability Rights Rhode Island filed a class action lawsuit against the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC), claiming that their use of solitary confinement violates the 8th Amendment and federal disability law. Charlene Liberty, one of the six plaintiffs, struggles with psychiatric disabilities, and her placement in solitary drove her to attempt suicide several times. Ultimately, the lawsuit said, officials at the Adult Correctional Institution (ACI) punished Ms. Liberty with solitary confinement for attempting suicide. An attorney with the Disability Law Center estimated that at least 100 people with mental illness are held in solitary confinement at ACI every year. The lawsuit calls for an end to isolation of people with mental illness as well as implementation of alternatives to solitary.

The *Seattle Times* [reported](#) that five hunger strikers incarcerated in Washington State have filed a lawsuit against the Washington Department of Corrections (WADOC), claiming they were transferred from Clallam Bay Corrections Center to Washington State Penitentiary and put in solitary confinement for no reason. The WADOC claims the men participated in a hunger strike, along with dozens of other men, and officials placed fifteen of the hunger strikers in administrative segregation. The department claims the men threatened others who did not participate in the strike, though the plaintiffs claim that the officials have refused to provide any evidence. The lawsuit claims the WADOC has violated the mens rights of due process and inflicted cruel and unusual punishment.

[According](#) to WPTV, Florida Senator Bill Montford has introduced a bill banning the placement of minors in solitary confinement across the state. Montford said, We just got to use a little bit of common sense. We know the downsides of solitary confinement. Why take the chance for the youth? Seven other states have already banned solitary confinement for youth.

The City [published](#) the story of Kenneth Samuels, who spent two and a half years in solitary confinement at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in New York. While the officers claimed Samuels assaulted three guards, Samuels has received \$200,000 from the settlement of a lawsuit alleging that the officers actually attacked him. Ive got a permanent headache and will likely have to spend a portion of the money on medication, Samuels said. After the incident, Samuels was given a hearing, but he was reportedly not allowed to present witnesses and since then, one of the accusing officers was convicted of attempted fraudulent practice and fired from the department. The hearing officer found Samuels guilty and sent him to solitary for 30 months. According to the DOC, 2,345 people are in solitary across New York prisons and 408 are held in keeplock.

The *Arkansas Times* [reported](#) that the Institute of Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown University Law School filed a court [brief](#), requesting another trial for a man with psychiatric disabilities who spend 203 days in solitary at the Ouachita River Unit in Arkansas. Charles Hamner, the plaintiff, faced highly restrictive isolation allegedly for his own protection since he cooperated in an investigation. But according to the brief, Hamner was provided little or no explanation for his isolation and now experiences long-lasting psychological and emotional consequences. In addition to claiming Hamners constitutional rights were violated, the brief argued that solitary damages public trust, solitary used as protection for witnesses disincentivizes cooperation, solitary inhibits successful reentry, and it undercuts international support for extradition.

The *Crime Report* published an [article](#) written by Jeremiah Bourgeois, a recipient of Solitary Watches 2019 Solitary Confinement Reporting Project Grant who was released last week after serving over 27 years in the Washington Department of Corrections. Bourgeois, who entered prison at fourteen years old, discusses the adaptation necessary for humans to survive in the midst of inhumanity in prison life. Solitary confinement, Bourgeois explains, is one of the brute force methods that officers impose on people in defense of

safety. Solitary, and in general the treatment of incarcerated people by staff, ultimately induces trauma and reduces people to objects. It is this stripping of humanity that Bourgeois says forced him to adopt a convict mentality, which he now returns home with more than two decades later.

Valerie Kiebala 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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