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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 [Aviva Stahl](#) | November 22, 2015

An incarcerated journalist and survivor of solitary, Christopher Zoukis, reflects on his experiences for [the Huffington Post](#).

According to the [New York Daily News](#), NYC has agreed to pay \$3.8 million to the family of a man who died while in solitary confinement on Rikers Island. Jason Echevarria, 25, died in August 2012 after swallowing a toxic soap ball.

Idaho has become [the latest state to move towards solitary reforms](#). At a recent Board of Corrections hearing, Department of Corrections Director Kevin Kempf said, We're behind the times and that's not a position I want to be in. This is huge.

The alleged boss of the Aryan Brotherhood was [sentenced to 50 years in solitary](#) after being convicted of continuing his gang activity on the inside. James Byrd, 45, was previously serving his time in a federal prison but was transferred to a Texas facility so that he could be placed in isolation for his gang affiliation.

A public interest law firm [has a filed a class-action lawsuit](#), in which they allege that the use of solitary confinement at Santa Clara County Jail is inhumane and unconstitutional. Kelly Knapp, a lawyer with the Prison Law Office, said The county cannot violate their constitutional rights by housing them or locking them in tiny, cramped cells. Or denying them their basic human needs of exercise, sunlight, human interaction.

The cost of solitary confinement doesn't add up, critics say, according to an article posted on [the Daily Item](#). By one calculation, Texans could save an annual \$33 million by cutting its solitary confinement rate from 4.4 percent of the prison population to Mississippi's rate: 1.4 percent.

A prison guard accused of sexually assaulting women while they were in solitary confinement has [been accepted into pretrial intervention](#), meaning he will acquire a criminal record or serve any prison time. John Ledbetter, a former correctional officer at Mercer County jail, had faced charges of rape and multiple counts of second-degree sexual assault.

Correctional union leaders in Connecticut are calling [for changes in policy](#) after a man held in administrative segregation at Cheshire Correctional Institution assaulted four guards. The department and the Malloy administration have made changes on how Connecticut's most dangerous and violent inmates are housed and managed, said union president Rudy Demiraj. These changes were made to appease outside interest groups and the inmate population, and are undoubtedly leading to more assaults on officers.

[Brown Political Review](#) published an article entitled Beyond Solitary Confinement: Lessons from European Prison Reform, in which they examine European approaches to solitary in the UK and beyond.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. She's written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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<http://www.tdcaa.com/journal/%E2%80%98-good-and-faithful-brother%E2%80%99>

The goal was to have Byrd in TDCJ, where he will remain segregated, as opposed to the federal Bureau of Prisons facility where he would be allowed to remain on a yard and stay affiliated with the ABT.

Penal code 71.023 is often called the kingpin statute, under which we could allege that Byrd used his position of rank to direct the commission of criminal offenses by other ABT affiliates. The punishment under 71.023 is 25 years to life. Using this statute adds an extra element of proving that an individual is directing the activities of the criminal street gang, as opposed to merely participating in them.

In your Alaska piece there is this link below to a somewhat similar case where the federal prosecutors manipulated the state to place a prisoner in isolation.

http://ombud.alaska.gov/reports/A2015-0320_DOC-final-public.pdf

U.S. Marshals Service submitted a request to ACC that the Inmate be held in administrative segregation. The request came in the form of a Field Report and stated, in relevant part: On 8-22-2013 the U.S. Marshals for the District of Alaska were provided information with respect to Federal Inmate, [Name Redacted by Ombudsman], located at the Cook Inlet/ACC-West. Past information alleges that [INMATE], while not in custody, has forcibly sodomized persons with foreign objects causing great bodily harm.

Current information received by the Marshals indicates that [INMATE] is openly expressing his desire to sexually accost Native inmates at the Cook Inlet/ACC-West. In order to maintain the safety and well-being of other inmates, the U.S. Marshals are respectfully requesting that the Department of Corrections place [INMATE] in segregation for administrative purposes until further notice.

Now neither person is someone I would want bunking in my cell but future cases can now sight Byrds case when seeking a similar outcome.

An actual 50 year sentence in isolation is something I never heard of before. Oh we have the Angola 3 and Thomas Silversteins examples of an effective life sentence in isolation. And in Silversteins case Judge Philip Brimmer, in dismissing his case declared that Silversteins conditions of confinement at the U.S. Penitentiary Administrative Maximum, or ADX, are atypically extreme.

<http://solitarywatch.com/2011/10/06/federal-judge-rules-28-years-in-solitary-confinement-not-extreme-dismisses-silverstein-case/>

Now I am sure few give a damn about Silverstein or Byrd spending the rest of their life in isolation but their cases are important in that now they will be used to seek such conditions for some individuals that have much wider public support.

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