

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/09/07/life-and-death-in-pennsylvanias-solitary-confinement-cells/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | September 7, 2010

Matt Stroud has been doing excellent reporting on solitary confinement in the weekly *Philadelphia City Paper*. In August he published [A Death in Solitary](#).

When Matthew Bullock, a 32-year-old convicted killer, fashioned a noose from a bed sheet that he wasn't supposed to have, secured it around his neck, tied it to thin steel bars in the face-high window of his solitary confinement cell, then sat down hard in an effort to break his neck and suffocate himself, it wasn't the first time he'd attempted suicide. In fact, according to a civil lawsuit filed in November 2009 by Bullock's parents against officials at the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) and officials and state-contracted health care providers at the State Correctional Institution at Dallas (SCI Dallas) where Bullock's lifeless body was found hanging on Aug. 24, 2009, Bullock, who had a long history of mental illness, psychotic episodes and auditory hallucinations, had tried to kill himself at least 20 documented times in the decade before his 2003 incarceration, and several more times since. Autopsy photos taken after Bullock's suicide showed that his forearms were covered from wrist to bicep with scars, apparently self-inflicted by razors and knives. One scar on his right inner wrist appeared to be recent, with scabs only superficially formed. The scars were both horizontal and vertical. Veins were crossed and traced while cuts intersected and mingled. The number of suicidal cuts in both arms was too high to count.

Yet Richard Elders, DOC's director of the Bureau of Health Care Services, wrote in a Sept. 2 report obtained by Bullock's parents attorneys: Offender Bullock did not give any indications that he was going to harm himself. There was no indication noted by staff members who regularly interacted with Offender Bullock that he was depressed and would take his own life.

Bullock's parents say that's simply not true. In their lawsuit, they claim that not only had Bullock tried to kill himself while in custody on multiple occasions, but their son also had repeatedly told SCI Dallas corrections officers (COs) about his suicidal inclinations. The COs didn't ignore him, according to the lawsuit and written statements provided by fellow inmates: They taunted him and actually encouraged him to take his own life.

When he told COs of his suicidal tendencies, the lawsuit continues, prison officials moved him from a solitary cell that was within view of an observation camera to one that wasn't. Then, the lawsuit alleges, someone slipped him instrumentalities which are commonly used to commit or attempt suicide: a bed sheet, which suicidal inmates in the hole are not supposed to have and COs incited [Bullock] to kill himself.

After that, family attorney Shelley Centini says, Bullock was left alone for hours, though DOC policy mandates that inmates in solitary be checked on every 30 minutes.

During that time, Matthew Bullock made good on his death wish.

The long piece is worth reading in full among other things, for its depiction of the torturous conditions in the RHU (Restricted Housing Unit). Much of the testimony from prisoners in solitary comes from *Institutionalized Cruelty*, a recent report from the Human Rights Coalition/Fed up! in Pittsburgh.

As Stroud reported last week, the state of Pennsylvania insists that solitary confinement simply does not exist in its prisons even though one man has now spent 37 years in isolation.

In Pennsylvania, the phrase itself is controversial. Last month, in testimony before the state House Judiciary Committee, Michael D. Klopotoski, deputy secretary of the Department of Corrections (DOC) Eastern Region, said no prisoners in this state not even one can be classified as serving time in solitary confinement. Susan McNaughton, a DOC press secretary, clarified his semantic stance via e-mail last week: Solitary confinement is considered where an individual has no contact with other individuals. This is just not the case [in Pennsylvania].

In DOC's view, even the vilest Pennsylvania inmate in state prisons restricted housing units (RHUs) has contact with prison staff and is granted brief outdoor recreation time, where, according to McNaughton, they may have non-contact interaction with others, including other inmates in the individual exercise pens. So, that is why we don't consider it to be solitary confinement. They are housed in our

restricted housing units, which are maximum security units within our prisons.



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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OK PA state let me tell you something you saying you do not use solitary is like me saying 9/11 never happend and you trying to cover it up but leaving the rubal with a sine to say allabout it now as for you in the uper ranks of the DOCS plese go to your states capitel and this is for the the one who siad he works the eastern part of the DOCS plese open your eays and oh ya look for a places in your part of runings not far from your one your intakes now look for a nashnal historik land mark thats right in the midel of the eastern distric of your capitel hears your smokeing rubel of two towers its called ESP eastern state pennitenary ya you know you need to go inside and lern bout your state ok first off cant blame esp for solitary no one knowen what it do back then but now after this i want you to look at every prsion you use any form of seg in your prisons and then tell me you dont have solitary in PA state you started it esp lerned from it self it stoped doing it now plese get your head out you asses and lern from what ESP showed you years in the past solitary dose not work so do as it did and eng it oh in case your not sher what is solitary sens your so brainwashed seg addseg icelashion suchushion shu RHU ds sc i dont give a F what you call it you know the saying a prison is a prison is a prison no mater what you call it or how you make it look it is still a prison same thing with solitary now if you think it so good to do to others oplese go spend a dam mouth in you RHU then tell me how you are after your state if any knows beter better yet plese for anyone in the DOCS FBOP DOJ plese go find your + to RHU and stay in it till your head is out your ass if it works like you say it dose dont worry you will not loose your minds from lol may thare be light in the darknes of justice

Anyone who is put into the care, responsibility and or accountability of the authorities is entitled to the fullest possible attention, no exceptions!

Anyone who has a psychiatric problem and who is in the care, the responsibility and or accountability of the authorities should be extra attended to, and never ever be left un-attended, un-monitored or even enabled to have any material at his or her disposal that could be used for anything that can be used as means to use on his or herself!

Anyone who has failed to attend someone who is the care of the authorities is to be held fully accountable for what is happening or has happened to that individual in his or here care, and upwards to the highest of authorities!

And I mean really held accountable, and not be protected by a warden, a secretary or a director of a facility.

I mean that such a person must be punished, by imprisonment, huge fines, and the decision to never ever be able to work in a position that puts other people in danger of being un-attended, un-cared for!

Bloody hell, this is AMERICA!

America is supposed not to be a third-world country were prisoners are put away and never looked after ever again, were they rot in jail, were they are killed by fellow-prisoners for food, water and whatever!

This is AMERICA!

America, were we are supposed to have standards, ethics, and morals!

And not a system that let people with huge problems die in their cells due to the un-care of wardens, the indifference of managers, the profit-hunters of private organizations!

A complete reform of the prison-system is needed, demanded and adjusted to the year 2010, not to the middle ages!  
People without responsibility are to be fired, held accountable for what they didnt do, are to be punished for what they did to inmates, for what they allowed to happen to inmates, regardless of the inmates mental problems!

Only indifferent systems allow people who they incarcerate to die, to kill themselves, not systems were the claim is to be the best, the most powerful!

AMERICA! WAKE UP CALL!

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