

# Solitary Watch

## 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, 2017

In an [article](#) in *The Conversation*, a clinical psychologist who has conducted neuroscience research in a Connecticut state prison points out that solitary confinement can lead to hallucinations, fantasies and paranoia; it can increase anxiety, depression and apathy as well as difficulties in thinking concentrating, remembering, paying attention and controlling impulses, which not only lessen the chances of effective rehabilitation, but also increase the level of danger inside prisons. As an alternative to solitary confinement, the author explains that neuroscience has the ability to understand some of the most complex and dysfunctional behavioral problems, and to suggest ways to improve behavior through personalized psychological treatment.

Following the filing of a lawsuit [last week](#) by children held in solitary confinement at Kings County Regional Justice Center in Kent, Washington, King County Councilman Rob Dembowski introduced new legislation that would prohibit the use of solitary for juveniles and increase the standard of education and therapeutic services at the jail. Dembowski [told](#) *The Kent Reporter*, Justice-involved youth will come out of the system and return to our society. I believe that we should do what we can to support them as productive members of our community.

VICE News [reported](#) that Joaquin El Chapo Guzmán, held in the federal Metropolitan Correctional Center in Lower Manhattan on charges of leading the Sinaloa cartel, has demonstrated symptoms of mental deterioration from the time he has spent in solitary confinement in the U.S., according to his lawyer. The lawyer argues that the extreme isolation caused by the Special Administrative Measures that the government asserts are necessary to prevent his escape have led to memory loss, auditory hallucinations, paranoia, and depression as well as constant headaches, ringing in his ears and throat pain. Guzmán's lawyer claims without treatment, his mental state may eventually decline into incompetence, preventing him from standing trial.

A group of prison officials from over a dozen states have been taking trips to prisons in Norway, Germany, and the Netherlands, in a project organized by the Prison Law Office and the Vera Institute of Justice. The visits have inspired officials in several states to begin moving towards a more rehabilitative approach, with the aim of better preparing incarcerated individuals for re-entering society. An [article](#) in *The Marshall Project* depicts examples of such modifications, including a reduction in both Rhode Island and North Dakota's use of solitary confinement, a mentorship program in a Connecticut facility, and a retreat for families of incarcerated individuals in Idaho. While a culture of punishment still dominates U.S. prisons, some officials are beginning to recognize that in the U.S., as in Europe, most prisoners will return home, says one organizer of the trips. If they are not rehabilitated by then, they may commit more crimes, and Europeans understand this far better than Americans.

At Lincoln Hills School in Irma, Wisconsin, Department of Corrections (DOC) officials continue to use pepper spray and solitary confinement against the youth held in the facility, despite a court order in July from Judge James Peterson to eliminate or significantly reduce the use of both practices. *The Wisconsin State Journal* [reported](#) that DOC officials cited a recent increase in unrest among the youth at the facility as the reason for not complying with the court order, though a recent report from state attorneys has documented that lessening the length of solitary confinement stays at the facility has resulted in fewer combative incidents that typically require pepper spray.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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