

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/12/30/isolated-california-inmates-continue-their-fight-for-reform/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | December 30, 2011

Since the widespread hunger strikes across California protesting the conditions of long-term solitary confinement in the California prison system, there have yet to be any indications of substantive change on the horizon.

According to the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition, [three hunger strikers](#) have committed suicide two in Pelican Bay State Prisons Security Housing and another at Calipatria State Prisons Administrative Segregation Unit. This has been denied by CDCR Terry Thornton who [claims that none of the prisoners](#) participated in the hunger strike. According to family members of Johnny Owen Vick, one of the Pelican Bay prisoners, Vick had been suffering from mental health issues for years before his [September suicide](#) and had at one point been in the SHU. The father of Hozel Blanchard, Jr., the prisoner at Calipatria State Prison, contrary to Thorntons assertion, has insisted that his son had in fact [been a hunger striker](#).

There have been reports of hunger striker leaders at Pelican Bay State Prison facing disciplinary action for their participation in the strikes. One hunger strike leader reported that:

On November 30th, myself and several other men here (whom CDCR has labeled as leaders of the peaceful-protests) received serious rule violations, charging us with causing a riot/mass disturbance and they referred it for felony prosecution, to the local D.As office.

And further, that:

The Ad-Seg/ ASU units are bad news I was never housed in them until being put in the one here on Sept. 29th, this was CDCRs retaliatory action against (15) of us here. We were all isolated on a tier, in strip cells with nothing but a set of clothes and fish kit (spoon, cup, bar of soap, etc), with ice cold air blasting outta the vents!

Confinement in the ASU reportedly lasted until October 13th, the end of the Pelican Bay hunger strike.

Since this time, there has been difficulty maintaining the momentum sparked by the first hunger strike, which notably led in a historic [California Assembly hearing](#) on the matter with promises of future Public Safety Committee inquiries into the system of solitary confinement.

The frustration with the slow-moving CDCR has apparently led to ASU prisoners at Corcoran State Prison to launch a hunger strike on December 28th (more information is forthcoming). A letter declaring the purpose of the hunger strike, along with a list of demands (similar in nature to the previous hunger strike demands) [has been published](#) on December 30th.

Dated December 22nd, the below letter is from the Pelican Bay Short Corridora group of incarcerated people considered the leaders of the previous hunger strikes. It is reflective of the growing frustration and determination among prisoners to see to it that their situation and cause remains in the publics awareness and urges individuals to keep the pressure on CDCR and the California government to fully address this issue.

Pelican Bay Short Corridor Update

(December 2011)

A Shout-out of respect and solidarity from the Pelican Bay Short Corridor Collective to all similarly situated prisoners subject to the continuing torturous conditions of confinement in these barbaric SHU & Ad/Seg units across this country and around the world.

This is our update of where things currently stand and where were going with this struggle for an end to draconian policies and practices summarized in our Formal Complaint (and many related documents published and posted online, since early 2011)

As many of you know beginning in early (2010), the PBSP SHU Short Corridor Collective initiated action to educate people and bring wide spread exposure to the (25+) years of ongoing progressive human rights violations going unchecked here in the California

Department of Corruption via dissemination of our Formal Complaint to 100s of people, organizations, lawmakers, Secretary Cate, etc wherein, we also sought support and meaningful change.

The response by CDCR Secretary Cate was file an inmate appeal (collectively, wed filed thousands); therefore, after much reconsideration and dialogue, the collective decided to take the fight to the next level via peaceful protest action in the form of hunger strike.

With the above in mind beginning in early (2011) we again sought to educate people about the ongoing torture prevalent in these prison systems solitary confinement units; and pointing out our position that the administrative grievance process is a sham, and the court systems turned a blind eye to such blatantly illegal practices Leaving us with no other meaningful avenue for obtaining relief, other than to put our lives on the line and thereby draw the line and force changes, via collective peaceful protest hunger strike action.

We believed this was the only fully advantageous way for us to expose such outrageous abuse of state power, to the world and gain the outside support needed to help force real change.

We requested support in the form of asking people to write letters to those in power we received more support than we ever expected in the form of letters, rallies, and hunger strike participants more than (18,000) similarly situated prisoners and some people on the outside!

All united in solidarity, with a collective awareness that the draconian torture practices described in our Formal Complaint are prevalent across the land; and that united in peaceful action, we have the power to force changes.

The hunger strike actions of (2011) achieved some success, in the form of mainstream world wide exposure solid, continuing outside support some small improvements to SHU/Ad-Seg unit conditions and assurances of more meaningful substantive changes to the overall policies and practices re: basis for placement and amount of time spent, in such units a substantive review of all prisoners files, per new criteria and more change to the actual conditions in such units.

However, this fight is far from over! Notably, the second hunger strike action was suspended in mid-October in response to top CDCR administrators presentation that the substantive changes be finalized would be provided to the stakeholders (this includes our attorneys), within 60 days for comment. To date, CDCR hasnt produced anything re: SHU/Ad-Seg policy changes; and PBSPs Warden has not even replied to the (2) memos weve sent him concerning additional program privilege issues, per core demand #5 (see footnote #1 below)

Naturally, many people are not happy about CDCRs failure to abide by their word again and they are asking whats the next move in this struggle?

Based on our collective discussions, our response is people need to remain focused, and continue to apply pressure on CDCR, via letters, emails, fax, etc summarizing the continuing core demands immediately! Theres real power in numbers!! (see addresses to contact below, at footnote #2)

Its important for everyone to stay objective and on the same page remember united we win, divided we lose. And, if we dont see real substantive changes within the next 6 months well have to re-evaluate our position.

Additionally, now is a good time for people to start a dialogue about changing the climate on these level IV mainlines As it stands now, these lines are warehouses, with all the money meant for programs rehabilitation, going into guard pockets.

Its in all of our best interests to change this in a big way, and thereby force CDCR to open these lines up and provide all of us with the programs and rehabilitative services that we all should have coming to us!!

Respect and Solidarity,

T. Ashker, A. Castellanos, Sitawa (s/n Dewberry), A. Guillen

-Dec. 2011-

Footnote#1:To date, weve received zero improvements re: core demand #5 while Corcoran and Tehachapi have gained on canteen and dip-pull up bars which, is all good. This is an example of what we pointed out in our Formal Complaint re: disparate treatment at PBSP-SHU compared to other SHUs.

This is also a typical CDCR attempt to create discord and disruption to our unified strugglewere certain this feeble move will fail because all of us understand what our main objective is an end to long term torture in these isolation units! It is our fundamental right to be treated humanely we can no longer accept state sanctioned torture of our selves! (and, our loved ones!) and we remain unified in our resistance!!

Footnote#2:Addresses of people to write

1. Tom Ammiano, Assemblyman2. Governor Edmund G. Brown

Capitol Bldg. Rm# 4005 State Capitol, Ste #1173

Sacramento, CA 95814 Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone# 916-319-2013Phone# 916-446-2841

Fax# 916-319-2113 Fax# 916-558-3160

3. CDCR Secretary Matthew Cate4. Carol Strickman, Attorney at Law

1515 S. St. Ste. #3301540 Market Street, Ste. #490

Sacramento, CA 95811 San Francisco, CA 94102

Phone# 916-323-6001 Phone# 415-255-7036

Fax# 415-552-3150

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

I think it should be evaluated by individual case basis, depending on the crime, the pre-meditation involved in the crime and the level of remorse at the time of sentencing to determine if SHU should be given. There are some criminals who deserve this type of punishment while the majority doesn't. I would like to see criminals such as Jeffery Dahmer, UniBomber, Richard Ramirez and Scott Peterson, Mob Hitmen, Drug Cartels, get this sort of SHU. But I don't think young offenders who ended up in the system and are reformed should have to go through this. There are criminals on Life Without Parole who committed more heinous crimes and should be in SHU for it, however they get trailer conjugal visits with spouses and girlfriends? That's wrong. I think it should be based on a case by case analysis.

Solitary confinement/SHU/The hole is a truly barbaric, cruel and torturous punishment to subject men, any man to. Yet many first time nonviolent offenders are being subjected to this very practice all across America. Being held indefinitely in SHU/ Solitary has become a commonplace practice in prisons all across America.

This practice is inhumane. If we are to call ourselves a civilized society we cannot keep quiet when such inhumanity exists against our fellow countrymen.

The mischaracterization by the media of men in prison is simply not true. If we are to believe everything we see on TV and what we hear in the media, all prisoners are dangerous criminals out to kill you. This is an absolute falsehood and media corporations who engage in such programming and false depictions must be pulled on on this.

There is only a very small percentage of the prison population which is actually truly psychotic and dangerous. The rest of the prison population, the majority are men and women, just like you and I, who made a mistake and who need education, classes, help, not to be subjected to the cruel torture of solitary.

To subject these people to this inhumane treatment by arbitrarily throwing them in solitary without charge, without cause and without due process is appalling and yet it is happening all across this country and who is speaking against it?

We cannot call ourselves a civilized nation and allow this torture to happen in our own backyards to our fellow countrymen, it is uncivilized to allow this to continue.

The wardens who participate in this cruel practice, are failing our society and not doing their jobs. Studies have shown that holding men in solitary is psychologically damaging, legal scholars, judges, organizations the world over recognize that solitary is torture and serves no one. ON the contrary studies show that it causes dreadful problems to subject men to this isolation and severe deprivation.

Our outdated, backward, inhumane policy of ill-treating our fellow country men by subjecting them to solitary confinement, has gone on for far too long, it is torture and it must stop. In the name of humanity it must. This practice serves no one least of all our society where these young men must return to live someday. What these men need is help, classes, a chance, a break, options. To people who call for to oh lock them up and throw away the key I say stop calling for something you could never endure yourself, to send a man to solitary for months on end 8 months, 225 days and nights in a cage, the sensory deprivation the isolation is barbaric and cruel. Many times the reason for sending men to solitary is for minor offenses, extra food in their cell, taking too much time in the shower, advocating for better conditions, involvement in a row/argument. I mean really to subject a man to solitary for any of this is truly an outrage and we who know that it exists and that this happens are outraged, incensed if the truth be known.

If wardens have nothing better to contribute to their jobs than this proven failed practice, then I say, out with the old and in with the new. Let's get some people in there who can do the job and be humane and creative and serve the men they were hired to serve and the public too.

If this is the best that wardens can do in dealing with any of the above incidents, then can only come up, then I say shame on them and

that they need to be in a different line of work as they are not serving the communities they were hired to serve.

The communities where this exists are being ill served and the men who work in these prisons and see this barbaric treatment of men who yes made a mistake, committed a crime, many first time non-violent offenders (I am not talking about psychotic murderers. Only a very small percent of prisoners are this) I am talking about men who yes made a mistake and are paying the ultimate price. Life as they know it as you and I know it gone from them, taken away. Prison is THE punishment. Make no mistake about it, prison is hell. There is absolutely nothing pretty about prison. Those who are of the mistaken belief that prison is a cakewalk have never, ever set foot inside a prison or know the horror of a cold, steel, grey, soulless concrete barbed wired fenced in ugly prison, never. All freedoms are taken away and prisoners pay the ultimate price, they are removed from life, from their children, from their families, moms, dads, wives, everything gone.

We all need to speak out, be it anonymous or not. Let our voices ring out about the inhumanity, let the prison guards add their voices to what they have witnessed.

Yes these men/inmates made a mistake, committed a crime, went to prison for a term. But while they are there they are not to be subjected to this type of torture. Enough with this unconscionable practice, enough with the hiding behind the well worn mantra that it is for societies sake. It isnt, it is because wardens lack humanity and creativity and initiative and education and fail to see and recognize study after study after study which says that this practice is torture.

Wardens need to get with the program and work to make our communities better not worse by engaging in this futile inhumane torturous practice of holding men indefinitely in SHU/Solitary. It is a disgrace and must stop now. Let us all who live and breath and recognize the humanity that exists in all men everywhere regardless, that they deserve a chance, a break.

Corrected version sorry for earlier post with many typos

This is a truly barbaric, cruel and unusual punishment to subject men, many first the nonviolent offenders to indefinite time in SHU/Solitary. It is inhumane and if we are to call ourselves a civilized society we cannot keep quiet when such inhumanity exists against our fellow countrymen. The mischaracterization of the media of men in prison is simply not true. There is only a very small percentage of the prison population which is psychotic and dangerous the rest are just men and women who made a mistake and who need education, classes, help. To subject these people to inhumane treatment by arbitrarily throwing them in solitary without charge, without cause and without due process is happening all across this country and who is speaking to it? The wardens who participate in this cruel practice, are failing our society. Studies have shown that holding men in solitary is psychologically damaging, legal scholars, judges, many organizations the world over recognize our backward, inhumane policy of ill-treating our fellow country men by subjecting them to solitary confinement. It is torture and it must stop. In the name of humanity it must stop. It serves no one least of all our society where these young men must return to someday. What they need is help, classes, a chance, a break. To people who call for to oh lock them up and throw away the key I say stop calling for something you could never endure yourself, to send a man to solitary for months on end 8 months, 225 days and nights in a cage, the sensory deprivation the isolation and many times it is for minor offenses. If warden can only come up with this for to do their job then I say shame on them and that they need to be in a different line of work as they are not serving the communities they are supposed to serve. The communities where this exists are being ill served and the men who work in these prisons and see this barbaric treatment of men who simply made a mistake (I am not talking about psychotic murderers as above a very small percent of prisoners are this) I am talking about men who made a mistake, committed a crime, went to prison for a term. But while they are there they are not to be subjected to this type of torture. Enough with this unconscionable practice, enough with the hiding behind the well worn mantra that it is for societies sake. It isnt, it is because warden lack humanity and creativity and initiative and education and fail to see and recognize study after study after study which says that this practice is torture. Wardens get with the program and work to make our communities better not worse by engaging in this futile inhumane torturous practice of holding men indefinitely in SHU/Solitary. It is a disgrace and must stop now.

Let all who live and breath and recognize the humanity that exists in all men and that they deserve a chance let us all call our representative and senators and congress and each make a call or two or three. Society needs that humanity let us all do our small part, now. Let us not wait for these poor wounded men to have to endure this all across this country, it is an abomination and must stop. Let all do our small part and make a call, write a letter and give each other a break.

it is time to end the use of solitary in such ways as it is being used now odd thing is i am glad to see the one thing i said at the turn of this year to 2012 was let this be the year we put the correct back in correctional let this be that year till that day comes we must all stand and be heard never give up the fight it is time to stand up to solitary and injustice done in prisons may there be light in the darkness of justice

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