

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/04/30/voices-from-solitary-colorado-department-of-corrections-in-need-of-correction/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | April 30, 2011

For seven years, **Clair L. Beazer** has been an inmate in the supermax Colorado State Penitentiary in [Caon City](#) which, as we've written before, qualifies as the [solitary confinement capital](#) of the Western World. In this essay, Beazer describes the effects of years of solitary confinement, pointing out that while it is particularly torturous for inmates already suffering from mental illness, this interminable, indefinite isolation also causes lasting psychological and physical damage to all prisoners who endure it.

Beazer notes that at long last, some hope is offered by the bill introduced in the Colorado state legislature to limit the use of solitary confinement. In an instance of grim irony, we received his essay, written last month, just a day before [lawmakers chose](#) to back away from most meaningful portions of the bill.

In most instances the law is a simple matter of doing what you should rather than what you want. One consequence of continuing to do what you want regardless is that a conscientious legislator someplace may find it necessary to propose a law to compel you to do what you should do.

Just such a circumstance has come about in the state of Colorado's Department of Corrections (C.D.O.C.), of whom some are known to say the reason they're called the Department of Corrections is because they're always getting it wrong.

The C.D.O.C.'s execrable practice of warehousing the mentally ill in lockdown 24/7 is unconscionable. To sentence men without due process to a solitary existence in a lonely cell with only the company of their psychoses and personal demons for interminable, indefinite periods, some lasting decades would and does appear on the surface alone indefensible. To further exacerbate their evil usage by holding them thus until their mandatory release date only serves to discharge infinitely more dangerous parolees into the public.

Enduring this type of incarceration has many debilitating effects, the most common being depression with accompanying apathy and lethargy. The minimal activity and lack of meaningful exercise can atrophy their legs and some can barely walk after years of inactivity, and you can bet that there is little market for ex-cons who can't even walk a quarter mile after release.

Then there's the other end of the spectrum, motivated, active, angry inmates that compulsively work out 2, 4, 8 hours a day in the fashion of the hardened vengeful convict portrayed by Robert DeNiro in the movie *Cape Fear*. For months, then years, then decades, driven by their isolation, not even allowed IN PRISON to walk out of a cell without a two or three-man escort. In restraints, handcuffs, shackles, belly chains, lock-boxes. Surrounded by thick concrete walls, high fences, barbed wire, razor wire, armed tower and perimeter guards, electrified kill fences.

Ominously and inevitably their long-awaited day arrives, and when it does the C.D.O.C. dutifully, imprisoned in full restraints, generic phentermine brands escorts them to the prison gates, where and when they unleash them upon the public. Not surprisingly, their recidivism rate is exponentially and in some cases horrifyingly higher, as is their toll on society you know, the public the C.D.O.C. ostensibly exists to defend.

The public may want to consider if perhaps the Prison Industrial Complex (of which the C.D.O.C. is definitely a part with its Incarceration Capitol of the World designation and proud title) finds it more profitable to release their home-made monsters. After all, we all know that high-profile horrific crimes can and often do drive news cycles, and have for years. Surely after all these years of high-profile horrific crimes that lead the news cycles somebody, anybody, everybody must have noticed that they drive incarceration rates.

Even so, no one is surprised that the C.D.O.C. has come out in fierce opposition to the Senate Bill 176 (introduced by Sen. Morgan Carroll, if passed the C.D.O.C. would need to limit the solitary confinement of mentally ill prisoners *Denver Post*, March 14, 2011), as they claim it is because they say there is no indication officials are abusing the use of solitary confinement. Please allow me, from my true insider perspective, to disabuse you of that notion because for those of us actually in solitary confinement, we say *they are abusing* the over-use of solitary confinement.

They also make the preposterous claim that the average stay is 18 months. Let me tell you that those numbers are about as off the books as C.D.O. (Collateralized Debt Obligation) at AIG. I personally have been in Ad Seg for 7 years. Let me to a survey, to my

immediate right 7 years, to my left 8 years, next to him 4 years and under me 10 years. In my 7 years, Ive only witnessed 2 men get of Ad Seg. 2!

The C.D.O.C. is in need of correction and the honorable Sen. Morgan Carroll and Rep. Claire Levy are the conscientious lawmakers trying to write another C.D.O.C. with Senate Bill 176, which is a start, a good start, at least, at long last.

I (we) dont have much hope up here in the shameless incarceration capital of the world, and maybe, just maybe these venerable legislators can compel the C.D.O.C to stop doing what it wants and force it to begin doing what it should.

You can read an earlier essay by Clair Beazer [here](#). Thanks to the [Real Cost of Prisons Project](#), which maintains an excellent [collection of prisoners writings](#), for passing on his work to Solitary Watch.

Clair Beazer welcomes mail at the following address: Mr. Clair L. Beazer, CSP #49801, C.C.F. Box Number 600, Canon City, CO 81215-0600.



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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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Claire,

I cannot for even one iota. imagine the pendulum of emotions you experience from day to day. I am simply unable to conjure a response to your situation. I endured only a year of darkness. Most perplexing is the inhumane manner in which the staff exact such decisions to continue a confinement that they unequivocally know causes irreparable mental illness. I am a woman from a city with 8 million people living closely. I have seen some of the most malicious, unfathomable acts of cruelty. However, when I looked into the eyes of the woman who continued my stay in the dark, I knew Debra Ahlin had no soul. I was relieved by my discovery as I knew she lived free in internal misery. I was in her hell and one day I would leave her to which she would never escape. D

DOC should implement a mandatory Ethics class. I believe after Plato, Socrates and Kant, Moral Rightness and Justice may begin to have meaning. A ruler is never wrong. Platos Republic left out the reaction: When society begins to see past the moral relativism that justifies behavior the rest of society deems criminal, the dark curtain will fall on the other side. How isolating that will feel.

Claire, you must know that many walk with you everyday. I continue to wonder where we can go from here. My heart tells me to continue to show people what a felon looks like. Every morning a reflection shines back at me. DOC imposed five years of mental anguish to break my spirit. Each emotional stike defined a new determination to fight. I am no longer afraid of anything. DOC took my family, my mind and my freedom. Having nothing left to covet, is humbling. I never stopped fighting the retaliation. I might have suffered further for it, but a rock stood long enough to exhausted them and like all animals, they moved on to regroup and find a new victim. You have 7 times more of that light. When you come to life, you will be a force for change. Ane example of all that is wrong with an abysmal failure. That day is arriving.

i must say fist off my hart and my respect gos out to you in a way that meny would only regard those who have served in war why i regard you so is your stong will making it thow 7 years like that i would not wish one year on anyone your right it is time we put the corest back in coreshons the plane of justice be dark and only the law of the tribunal be herd sad as that is to you and your fends of justice may thare be light in the darknes of justice

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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