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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | September 22, 2021

A new federal lawsuit alleges that men held in solitary confinement in Georgia State Prison are dangerously deprived of adequate mental healthcare, [reports](#) News Channel 9. Filed on September 10, the proposed class-action lawsuit seeks to stop prison officials from isolating people in deplorable conditions. In the last two years, at least 12 people in the prison have died by suicide, many of whom were held in solitary confinement at the time. The lawsuit elaborates that a staffing shortage, which cuts down on peoples recreation and shower time, has exacerbated already bleak conditions. People spend months or years in solitary confinement without access to the basic necessities of a dignified life, like sunshine, fresh air, clean living spaces, and mental health treatment, said Alison Ganem, an attorney at the Southern Center for Human Rights, one of the organizations that filed the lawsuit. Without immediate action to address these unconstitutional and immoral conditions, more people are likely to die.

Although New Yorks HALT Solitary Confinement Act, signed in April, bans solitary confinement beyond 14 days in New York prisons and jails, Norwood News [reports that](#) New York Citys new approved disciplinary model will still keep some people in solitary. The new model, called the Risk Management and Accountability System (RMAS), was adopted by the New York City Board of Corrections (BOC) in June, and will go into effect in November. City officials say RMAS complies with HALT by mandating a minimum of 10 hours of out-of-cell time and boosting programming, while improving access to lawyers and creating individualized behavioral support plans. However, activists say that individuals will still be confined for 23 hours a day, since out of cell time will occur in small, fenced-in cell extensions, which they say is solitary by another name. In addition to failing to comply with HALT, advocates and some politicians say RMAS falls short of Mayor Bill de Blasio's June 2020 promise to end solitary confinement in the city's jails. Meanwhile, the New York State Council of Probation Administrators have filed a federal lawsuit, alleging that HALTs ban on solitary will put officers at risk.

In another report about deplorable conditions at Rikers Island, City Limits [covered](#) the facility's poor accountability system for ensuring that people incarcerated in its restrictive housing units are safe during record-breaking heat waves. Two petitions were filed in Queens court on September 16, alleging that the city's Department of Corrections has outright refused to report on conditions during recent heat waves, including whether vulnerable residents were offered air conditioning and how regularly individuals were allowed to shower. The jails enhanced supervision units (ESH) are most at risk, with individuals held inside boiling hot cells as long as 17 hours a day. The petitions claim that [ESH] has become notorious for the life-threatening conditions inside the facility when the outside temperatures exceed 85 degrees Fahrenheit. Staff absenteeism has contributed to this problem by reducing the number of escorts that are required to transport people to recreation and showers to cool down. According to Yahoo! News, New York Governor Kathy Hochul plans to release 200 people from Rikers, after describing the facility as a volatile tinder box.

A former resident of New Hampshire's Sununu Youth Services Center has filed a lawsuit alleging that workers at the center routinely abused children incarcerated there, [reports](#) NBC Boston. Over 350 men and women have alleged abuse at the facility, spanning a period between 1963 to 2018. The facility has been under criminal investigation since 2019, and is scheduled to close in 2023. Among other abuses, the newest plaintiff alleged that staffers forced him to fight other teens for food and routinely sent him and others to solitary confinement in a room with no toilet. This is the third lawsuit against the center so far, after the second was dismissed by a judge.

Throughout [reports that](#) as the Biden administration resumed deportation flights to Haiti, more than 100 people went on hunger strike in Glades County Detention Facility, a Florida jail that operates as an immigration detention facility under a federal contract with ICE. The strikers are demanding release. Back in July, eight Congress members sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security demanding that the facility be shut down amidst lawsuits alleging civil rights violations of immigrants detained there. One Haitian man participating in the hunger strike claims to have faced retaliation for his advocacy. Ernst Francois was placed in solitary confinement after peaceful protests against the facility in February, and alleges that a deputy threatened to put a noose in his cell. Sofia Casini, from the organization Freedom for Immigrants, said that the Glades contract with ICE is, a money-making machine this is human trafficking, most people qualify for release.

NBC news [reports that](#) Damon Thibodeaux, who spent 15 years on death row before exoneration in 2012, has died of COVID-19. The Innocence Project, which worked with Thibodeaux and announced his death last week, tweeted that He was the 142nd person exonerated from death row and was never compensated for his lost freedom. According to NBC News, at the time of his death, a claim for

compensation was pending. His obituary describes how even after his release, Thibodeaux, suffered nightmares that returned him to the harrowing experience of his solitary confinement in a small single cell and the crushing despair, loneliness, and hopelessness. In 2014, Thibodeaux gave [powerful testimony](#) in a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearing on solitary confinement, where he stated, More than anything, solitary confinement is an existence without hope. While on death row he very seriously considered giving up my legal rights and letting the State execute me to avoid the agony of life in solitary.

The Washington Post [reports that](#) Alex Friedman, a prison reform advocate currently incarcerated at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution (RMSI) in Nashville, Tennessee, petitioned a federal judge that the solitary confinement he has been held in for 18 months violates his constitutional rights. Friedman states that he has been treated harshly at the prison due to my long-standing advocacy on behalf of Tennessee prisoners and my adversarial relationship with corrections officials. According to the lawsuit, individuals are usually only permitted outside recreation time every two to three days, and their cells are covered in steel plates with windows only two inches wide. Friedman alleges that the conditions in isolation are worse than on death row.

Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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