

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | September 30, 2021

[Reporting](#) from the Moultrie Observer draws on various investigations into conditions in Georgia prisons. At a legislative hearing last week, families spoke about the dangers their loved ones faced and the failure to protect them and provide appropriate care. Allegations include inadequate protection, medical neglect, staff absenteeism, and isolation of mentally ill individuals. The Southern Center for Human Rights, which sought a Department of Justice investigation into the prison system, is now also suing the state over its use of solitary confinement. 300 Georgians are currently being held in solitary, according to SCHR attorney Atteyah Hollie, and at least 70 percent of them have psychotic disabilities. The lack of transparency about these conditions exacerbates the issue. This past year, Hollie noted that 13 people had died but none of these were reported to the public.

WBUR [reports that](#) ten months after an assault on correctional officers took place in the Massachusetts Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center, a federal civil lawsuit alleges that officers went on to brutally retaliate against incarcerated individuals. The two plaintiffs allege they were among the many men rounded up and that officers brought them to a cell outside the view of surveillance cameras and attacked them inside the cell. The suit alleges, The Defendants true goal was to terrorize and beat the Plaintiffs as payback for the acts of other Latino and Black prisoners and to create an atmosphere of terror. Dozens of state officials named in the suit are believed to have given tactical teams of officers the green light to behave as they saw fit.

The Illinois Prison Project has calculated that, because the mental health issues generated by solitary confinement in its 43 clients added 15 years on average to their sentences, restrictive isolation has added 842 years to their cumulative prison time. WBEZ Chicago [reports on](#) the connection between time spent in solitary and worsened behavior while incarcerated, which has resulted in lengthier stays in prison for the projects clients. Executive director of the Prison Project Jennifer Soble insisted that we cant erase the psychological and physical harm many of them have suffered because of their time in solitary, however we hope to spare our clients hundreds of years of additional prison time.

The LA Times [reports that](#) a state agency that monitors youth detention facilities has found that both juvenile halls in Los Angeles County are unsuitable, after finding continuing violations of state regulations around inadequate health assessments and the use of solitary confinement. This is the first time the agency created in 2012 has found any California juvenile hall to be unsuitable. Almost all of the young people held in these centers are Black and Latino. In a unanimous vote by the Board of State and Community Corrections, the county has been given 60 days to remediate the violations or remove young people from the facilities.

WALB [reports that](#) parents of a transgender woman named Jenna Mitchell held in solitary confinement in Georgia are suing the Georgia Department of Corrections (DOC) after she committed suicide in her isolation cell. Mitchell suffered from bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and gender dysphoria, with a documented history of self-harm, and the lawsuit alleges that neglect on the part of the prison and Georgia DOC was the cause of her death. The suit specifically alleges that prison staff knew of Mitchells intention to commit suicide on the day she died, and did nothing to prevent it.

In South Carolina, WYFF [reports that](#) a state senate bill called the Juvenile Justice Reform Act aims to create a childrens bill of rights, improve provision of mental health care, and ban the use of solitary confinement for children. Wendy Varner, a supporter of the bill whose daughter was held in solitary confinement while incarcerated, said, I know one time I had spoken with her, she had been in isolation for so long, she didnt know what day it was.

Columnist Elisa Crespo [writes](#) in the Gotham Gazette about the danger that solitary confinement policies in New York pose to transgender individuals. She outlines the vulnerability of trans women in the carceral system, and describes how transgender people are still housed in federal facilities that do not align with their gender identity, and as a result face solitary confinement as a way of segregating them from general population. She says, Solitary confinement, which is merely an obfuscating term for torture, will never keep transgender incarcerated people safe. Neither will housing transgender people in sex-segregated facilities that dont match their gender identity. What we need are trans inclusive policies that consider the safety of each individual.

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

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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