

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | November 16, 2020

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* [reported](#) that a second wave of the coronavirus is hitting Pennsylvania prisons and jails, despite a statewide lockdown in March, keeping people locked in their cells for over 23 hours a day. Claire Shubik-Richards, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Prison Society said, What were seeing is a full-blown resurgence of coronavirus across the states correctional facilities. Omar Hooks, held at State Correctional Institution (SCI) Chester, said many do not report that they are sick. The 14 days without shower, phone, etc. deters people who are sick from coming forward, Hooks said. Dave Disciullo, also held at SCI Chester, said under the lockdown, Every two days we get out for 30 minutes to use the phone and get showers. I havent been outside in over 45 days. So far, 17 incarcerated people have died from the coronavirus across state prisons, six of them since mid-October.

[According](#) to the *Kansas City Star*, two incarcerated men have filed a lawsuit against the Kansas Department of Corrections, arguing that automatically and permanently placing people sentenced to death in conditions of solitary confinement violates the constitution. The ten people sentenced to death in Kansas have been held in administrative segregation for as long as 17 years. One 41-year-old plaintiff has been held in solitary for over 14 years at El Dorado Correctional Facility and another, a 39-year-old, has been in solitary for over 12 years at Lansing Correctional Facility. Currently, regardless of their behavior in prison, people can be placed in solitary for at least 22 hours a day in a cell the size of a parking spot, and the lawsuit calls for a meaningful individualized placement procedure for people with death sentences.

The *Maine Public* [reported](#) that the state Supreme Court ruled that the Maine Department of Corrections violated Doug Burrs constitutional rights when they placed him in solitary confinement at Maine State Prison for nearly two years on groundless charges. In 2014, Burr was accused of smuggling contraband and when he refused to admit the charges, he was thrown in solitary. A county superior court judge found that there was no evidence substantiating the claims against Burr but said the court did not have the authority to grant Burr relief. However, the Maine Supreme Court decided restore Burrs earned good time credit and award an injunctive relief order requiring the Department of Corrections to establish an objective mechanism for people to be released from solitary.

The *Chief* [reported](#) that the New York City Board of Correction has drawn up recommendations for a rule that would eliminate the use of solitary in city correctional facilities. Months earlier, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the city would abolish the practice a year after transgender woman Layleen Polanco died of a seizure in solitary confinement at Rikers Island. The president of the Correction Officers Benevolent Association removed himself from the working group that is drafting the recommendations, claiming that eliminating solitary confinement will increase jail violence. The oversight panels chair Jennifer Jones Austin said, The final rule will reflect a shared desire to reform restrictive housing in a way that achieves our goals concerning accountability with humane treatment and safety for all.

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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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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