

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/safe-alternatives-segregation-initiative-findings-recommendations>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

After decades of misuse and overuse, the role of solitary confinement in United States jails and prisons is now being addressed. In recent years, this practice also known as restrictive housing or segregation has been the subject of increased scrutiny from researchers, advocates, policymakers, media, and the government agencies responsible for people who are incarcerated. Against this backdrop, and in light of growing evidence that restrictive housing may harm people without improving safety in facilities, a number of departments of corrections are taking steps to reduce their reliance on this type of housing.

In 2015, Vera launched the Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative, with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. Through this initiative, Vera has partnered with ten corrections agencies on the local and state level to assess their policies and practices, analyze related outcomes, and provide recommendations for safely reducing the use of restrictive housing in their jails or prisons. Vera's reports to these partners are presented here.

The number of people in segregation ranged from 3 to 14 percent in the lowest to highest jurisdictions. As in other parts of the justice system, restrictive housing affects disproportionate numbers of young people, people living with mental illness, and people of color; however, change is possible.

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The practice can result in physical and psychological damage whose negative repercussions can persist well after release, making the transition to life in a prison's general population or in the community considerably more difficult.

Jurisdictions must pursue system-level strategies to foster people's well-being and positive behavior in their facilities' general population and ultimately reduce their use of restrictive housing.

PUBLICATION

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