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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 [Aviva Stahl](#) | September 4, 2016

The federal Bureau of Prisons has announced plans to [reduce its use](#) of double-celling, a practice in which multiple people are locked up in cramped isolation cells for periods of up to 23 or 24-hours per day. People confined to solitary develop coping mechanismsconstant pacing is one, very strict routines is another, said Allan Mills of the Uptown Peoples Law Center. Having a second person, always present, in a very small space with zero privacy, interferes with these coping mechanismsand one persons coping mechanism is another persons irritant.

A 17-year-old accused of attempted murder has been charged as an adult and as a result is currently being [held in solitary confinement](#) in a Florida jail. Lawyers for Jaimaijai Mensie are asking that she be released from the psychiatric unit where she is currently being held, and allowed to remain on house arrest with an electronic monitor while she awaits trial.

New Mexico Secretary of Corrections Gregg Marcantel was interviewed by [NPR](#) about his recent appearance on A&Es Behind Bars, and the time he put himself in solitary confinement. Even within the short span of three days, I began to run out of things to think about and I then began counting cracks on the wall (laughter), Marcantel explained. You know, your mind goes everywhere.

A regional jail in Washington has improved its treatment of people with mental illness, according to a [recently released report](#) by a local advocacy group, Disability Rights Washington. The jail has reduced the number of people sent to solitary by about 60 percent through the creation of three mental health pods, [according to jail staff](#), while also quadrupling the number of mental health providers.

The sheriff of Dane County, Wisconsin [wrote](#) about the two fully decompensated paranoid schizophrenics sitting in solitary confinement cells in my jails, and the broader problem of locking up people with mental illness. Frankly, dogs at the Humane Society are treated better than these two poor souls, both of whom were arrested for minor crimes, he said.

[The Village Voice](#) published an article about New Yorks Forgotten Female Prison Riot, which took place at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in 1974. The rebellion eventually resulted in a lawsuit, *Powell v. Ward*, which led to a binding pledge by prison officials to conduct disciplinary proceedings fairly, to only send truly mentally-ill prisoners to psychiatric hospitals, and with an award to the women of \$127,000.

Two hunger strikers at the Waupun Correctional Institution in Wisconsin have continued to deteriorate, and are now being force-fed only every 72-hours, according to a [press release](#) from outside activists an irregular feeding routine that may cause the men even greater health problems. LaRon McKinley and Cesar DeLeon have been refusing food for going on 76 days, and are demanding a one-year cap on any form of solitary confinement.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. Shes written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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.

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