

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/11/18/new-study-solitary-confinement-overused-in-colorado/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | November 18, 2011

A [new report on solitary confinement](#) in Colorado's state prisons concluded that there are far too many inmates in round-the-clock lockdown. A series of relatively modest changes in its classification, review, and mental health treatment practices would significantly reduce the number of prisoners in administrative segregation, the report found. The report was funded by the National Institute of Corrections, and its authors, James Austin and Emmitt Sparkman, were involved in the [dramatic reduction of solitary confinement](#) in Mississippi prisons.

Alan Prendergast, who has spent more than a decade reporting on Colorado prisons for Denver's weekly *Westword*, reviewed the report and provided [the following summary](#):

A study by researchers at the National Institute of Corrections has found that Colorado's approach to locking down its most unruly prisoners in 23-hour-a-day isolation is basically sound but could be used a lot less. Instead, even as the state's prison population is declining slightly, the use of administrative segregation, or solitary confinement, continues to increase.

The Colorado Department of Corrections houses close to 1,500 prisoners in ad-seg, about 7 percent of the entire state prison population. That's significantly above the national average of 2 percent or less and if you factor in the additional 670 prisoners who are in punitive segregation as a result of disciplinary actions, the CDOC figure is closer to 10 percent. And four out of ten of the [prisoners in solitary have a diagnosed mental illness](#), roughly double the proportion in 1999. The state's heavy reliance on ad-seg, including [building a second supermax prison](#) to house the overload, has put Colorado in the center of a growing national controversy over whether isolating prisoners creates more problems in the long run.

NIC researchers James Austin and Emmitt Sparkman were invited by DOC to prepare an external review of its ad-seg policies and classification system. Among other points, the pair found that the decision to send prisoners to lockdown has little review by headquarters; that there is considerable confusion in the operational memorandums and regulations on how the administrative segregation units are to function; that the average length of stay in isolation is about two years; and that 40 percent of the ad-seg prisoners are released directly to the community from lockdown, with no time spent in general population first.

Austin and Sparkman urge the DOC to require a mental health review before a prisoner is placed in ad-seg and to simplify the programs and phases inmates are required to complete before returning to a less restrictive prison. Even modest administrative changes would significantly reduce the state's lockdown population, they claim, freeing up cells for other uses and saving the state money, since supermax prisons are more costly to operate than lower-security facilities.

For more on solitary confinement in Colorado, read our article [Fortresses of Solitude](#).

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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@C: A famous sociologist by the name of Robert Merton called this goal displacement.

Merton believed it is a common phenomenon within large bureaucracies as bureaucrats displace the original goal of the bureaucracy with the goal of continued funding.

In this case the rehabilitation of prisoners is being displaced by impediments to the prisoners successful reintegration into society thus insuring the continual need of that institution.

This phenomenon transcends party affiliations.

@Carl Of course Mertons ideas have been well known since the early 1900s and the negative affects of isolation have been known even longer still. Yet nothing seems to change for the better.

Why? There is profit to be made on these least competitive members of our society.

Removing them removes a perceived dangerous class of people, a class that might rebel against authority and the criminal industrial complex their removal feeds creates a steady revenue stream paid by our tax dollars.

The rest of the poor are mere fodder for our foreign wars that also serve these same two goals. I read 90% of the military now come from just 10 states. Together these actions form a type of pressure relief valve.

How many of the OWS crowd will be swallowed up in this system before the elite regain control and feel safe again?

Whoever thought this all out was a diabolical genius!

So keep voting democrat everyone yay!

My opinion is that the solitary prison population will not be reduced this is a State job and union issue simply a Democrats preference support unions Well not see an end to prison population period its an industry supported by our current president that I believe i read here on Solitary Watch Obama approved more supermaxes.

These are not revelations rather they are confirmations of statements made in the past by many who are both incarcerated thus having no voice in the matter and those who have been exposed to such conditions but have been discredited as it was both unpopular in (train of thought) practice and contrary to current cultures to lock em up and throw away the key mentality.. The real solution to this problem is to change the culture and 1. remove the mentally ill from solitary confinement and into a treatment center for programming and medication compliance and 2. review those who have been in admin segregation for over six months and assess their mental health status to prevent further decomposing issues as it is the time spent there in the hole that is detrimental to their ability to cope and function within the rules of the location, the mentality of the staff inside such an environment and the harsh and toxic living conditions that impose isolation, deprivation and solitiare behaviors cutting off social contacts and humanity requirements that allow humans to survive such a housing assignment and be returned to GP at least six months before their release to adjust to social and other basic human needs for release to be successful and sufficient to keep them from coming back. as those who are directly released into the community will be back with a few exceptions.

This fact taken from the summary should alarm the general public.

40 percent of the ad-seg prisoners are released directly to the community from lockdown, with no time spent in general population first.

And four out of ten of the prisoners in solitary have a diagnosed mental illness, roughly double the proportion in 1999.

Does anyone at the CDOC see the correlation between their increased use of solitary confinement and the doubling of the number of inmates with mental illness housed in isolation?

The states solution:

building a second supermax prison to house the overload.,

has put Colorado in the center of a growing national controversy over whether isolating prisoners creates more problems in the long run.

Justifiably so I would think.

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