

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2009/12/30/aclu-says-youth-tortured-at-state-prison/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | December 30, 2009

This story out of Montana tells an all too common story: A boy who suffered extensive abuse in childhood, and was diagnosed with depression and PTSD, landed in a state juvenile facility; when he fought with corrections officers there, he was sentenced to 5 years and sent to an adult prison; once there, he was deemed a discipline problem after he damaged a fence, so he was placed in solitary and subjected to horrendous treatment that the ACLU does not hesitate to describe as torture.

The ACLU's lawsuit names not only the state, the Department of Corrections, and the warden, but also the prison's chief psychiatrist. From the Helena [Independent Record](#):

A 17-year-old boy suffering from mental illnesses was so traumatized by his deplorable treatment in the Montana State Prison that he twice attempted to kill himself by biting through the skin on his wrist to puncture a vein, a lawsuit filed Wednesday by the American Civil Liberties Union of Montana alleges.

The lawsuit filed in Lewis and Clark County District Court claims that the boy, Robert Doe, has been treated illegally and inhumanely and has been detained for about 10 months in solitary confinement. Doe was Tasered as part of a behavior modification plan, pepper-sprayed and stripped naked in view of other inmates, the complaint states.

His available mental health treatment consists of a prison staff member knocking on his door once a week and asking if he has any concerns, according to documents, and then he must answer by yelling within earshot of other inmates.

Since March, he has been locked in a solitary cell all but five to six hours a week, and he is not allowed personal visits or telephone calls.

For more information on the case, including the [press release and complaint](#), visit the ACLU of Montana's web site.

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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does he have support? I can not understand how families can abandon their people in the system. I write 10 people just to remind them theres someone out here out of the 9 6 are in isolation. out of the 9 5 have noone.

Does Robert have family support or anything? Is his name and address available now that hes 18 for people to write to him and let him know he is not forgotten?

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