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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Aviva Stahl](#) | February 19, 2017

Between 2012 and 2015, nine inmates in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester took their own lives, giving Oklahomas only state-owned maximum security prison the highest suicide rate among corrections facilities, according to an article published by [Oklahoma Watch](#). All were in a type of isolated confinement when they died.

A North Carolina inmate has been moved back to solitary confinement after getting a brief reprieve from his 13-year stretch in isolation, reported [the Charlotte Observer](#). Shawn Minnich, 49, was placed back in the box for allegedly threatening to injure prison staff. Minnich was one of seven people in the state who had been held in isolation for more than ten years, according to an investigation published last year by the Observer.

[House Bill 175 sailed through](#) New Mexico's House Consumers and Public Affairs Committee with a 4-0 vote, and will now move to the House Judiciary Committee. If made into law, the bill would ban solitary confinement for children, pregnant women, and people with serious mental illnesses.

A federal lawsuit [has been filed in](#) Vermont alleging that the state is holding some people in segregation even when it puts those individuals in danger. Our position is that if you're so sick that you have to be secluded for more than 24 hours in a seven-day period because you're dangerous to yourself or others, at that point you should be in a hospital and not in isolation, said A.J. Ruben of Disability Rights Vermont, the organization that filed the suit.

Geoff Klopp, President of the Correctional Officers Association of Delaware, [has claimed](#) people being down flowed from maximum security cells to the lower security housing at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center may have contributed to the recent uprising at the facility, as well as the death of correctional officer Lt. Steven Floyd. In 2016, the Delaware Department of Corrections and the states American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reached a settlement to reduce the use of solitary and establish additional services to people with mental illness at the Vaughn facility. The ACLU agreement contributed to Lt. Floyd's murder, Klopp emphasized, although the DOC denied his claim.

At a meeting of the oversight panel that oversees New York City's jails, city officials [defended their practice](#) of putting young people in restraint chairs. The desks are used in a unit that is supposed to serve as an alternative to solitary confinement for people to 18 to 21, and jail officials maintained that the desks enable young people to attend classes, since they were less fearful of being attacked. Some critics disagree. You are normalizing traumatizing them again, said Sarah Kerr, an attorney with the Prisoners Rights Project of the Legal Aid Society.

Omar Abdel Rahman, a blind Islamic cleric who was convicted in 1995 of terrorism charges, died at a federal prison near Raleigh, North Carolina. Rahman spent years in the most severe solitary confinement, barred from communicating with his followers, praying with other prisoners or even listening to Arabic radio, according to the [New York Times](#).

Protesters gathered in front of Limestone Correctional Facility in Alabama to ask for the release of two men from solitary confinement, Free Alabama Movement activists Dhati Khalid (James Pleasant) and Kinetik Justice (Robert Earl Council Jr), from solitary confinement. According to a [local outlet](#), protesters on Saturday claimed Council, Jr. and Pleasant have been targeted by the Alabama Department of Corrections with retaliation and repression for their roles in the cause.

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

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