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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | July 27, 2021

Corrections departments across the country have found ways to circumvent recent anti-solitary confinement legislation by simply renaming the cages that people are held in, [the Progressive reports](#). Unlock the Box director Jessica Sandoval described how it was common for facilities to trade new names in for solitary confinement, like special management unit or special housing unit. She maintained, however, that, when you talk to people there, they say were in solitary. After the passage of the Humane Alternatives to Long-term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act in New York State, for example, the New York City Board of Correction approved a rule that establishes the Risk Management Accountability System that would keep individuals locked up for most of the day indefinitely. Loophole strategies like this new one in New York City are common: In Massachusetts, individuals were kept in their cells for 21 hours a day, but the facility denied this was restrictive housing. In California, a class action lawsuit has been filed against the California DOC for circumventing reforms by holding people in Level IV general population units where it was discovered that they had even less time out of cell than in solitary confinement.

The ACLU of Virginia has disputed claims from the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) that restrictive housing has ended, the [Roanoke Times reports](#). The DOC insists that all incarcerated individuals have had four hours out-of-cell per day for the last 18 months, and that they have been transitioning individuals with serious mental illnesses to new restorative housing, but the ACLU of Virginia says otherwise. They have received word from inside that many are still held for 23 hours a day, and insist that the DOC, is able to make these unsubstantiated claims because there is no system of independent oversight over Virginia prisons, and therefore the public has no way to verify its alleged reforms, including whether the new so-called Restorative Housing unit will operate as another version of solitary confinement.

An article for [The Free Press describes](#) how in the Maine Correctional system, an individual accused of breaking rules can be punished regardless of whether the internal disciplinary court system actually found them guilty of the behavior. Officers can accuse individuals in court with little substantiation, in a system that the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition insists is unfairly subjective. Whether or not the verdict in a rule-break case is guilty or not guilty, individuals can lose good time, can be downgraded a privilege level, and that accusation will remain on that persons record.

On Friday, July 23rd, members of the Connecticut Stop Solitary campaign [staged a protest](#) outside the capitol building, petitioning legislators to override Governor Lamonts veto of the Protect Act, [reports the Hartford Courant](#). The bill limits Connecticut's use of solitary confinement and seclusion in prisons. Governor Lamont vetoed the bill, and [according to the Courant](#), activists have had trouble convincing holdout legislators to vote in favor of the Act. Anti-solitary advocate Barbara Fair insists that the veto, nullified all the voices of families who have been suffering, who gave their information at public hearings. She continued, We have to think about these are human beings that are being tortured under our watch and by us not voting to override the veto, were saying its OK.

One of the more notable members of the January 6th Capitol riots, Jacob Chansley, nicknamed the QAnon Shaman, has been found to suffer from several mental illnesses, exacerbated by his stint in solitary confinement since his arrest. [Reuters reports](#) that Chansley is negotiating a plea deal with prosecutors after prison psychologists discovered the extent of his condition, and his lawyer Albert Watkins suggested that, As he spent more time in solitary confinement the decline in his acuity was noticeable, even to an untrained eye. Chansley has spent the last several months in isolation at a jail in Alexandria, Virginia.

In a statement released on Monday the 19th, the Biden administration revealed that they transferred Abdul Latif Nasir out of Guantanamo Bay and back to his native Morocco, [NBC News reports](#). This is Bidens first transfer out of the facility. Nasir had been held in custody there since 2002, and spent two of those years in solitary confinement in a windowless cell, with the lights on constantly and no access to a lawyer. Nasir had been denied basic due process, according to the legal charity Reprieve that represents him, and was never actually charged with a crime. His transfer was meant to take place at the close of the Obama Administration, but it was not completed before Trump took office and he made no effort to repatriate Nasir.

Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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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