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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Aviva Stahl](#) | May 18, 2014



The following roundup features noteworthy news, reports and opinions on solitary confinement from the past week that have not been covered in other Solitary Watch posts.

[The New York Times](#) published an op-ed by Harvey Fierstein about the 16-year-old girl currently being held in solitary confinement in a Connecticut prison, despite the fact that she has never been charged, tried, or convicted of a crime. The teenager, who is transgender, was initially held at a mens prison but has since been transferred to a womens facility.

The Louisville [Courier-Journal](#) has a timeline of events leading up to the January 2014 death of a man who starved himself to death in solitary confinement at the Kentucky State Penitentiary after being denied medications for his psychiatric complaints.

A Mexican citizen is [suing high-level officials and agents at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\) agency](#), after he was allegedly beaten by ICE officers, denied medical treatment, and placed in solitary confinement for five months. In the lawsuit, Fernando Figueroa-Barajas claims that ICE agents falsely told jail staff that he was suicidal, resulting in his placement in isolation. Figueroa was initially arrested in September 2013 for a traffic violation.

[The BBC](#) published an in-depth article entitled, How extreme isolation warps the mind.

In his weekly message, Attorney General Eric Holder [condemned the practice](#) of placing young people in solitary confinement, especially those with mental illness. Across the country, far too many juvenile detention centers see isolation and solitary confinement as an appropriate way to handle challenging youth, in particular youth with disabilities But solitary confinement can be dangerous, and a serious impediment to the ability of juveniles to succeed once released.

A state official [testified](#) that solitary confinement may have worsened the mental health of Nikko Jenkins, the Nebraska man who killed three individuals shortly after his release from prison. Jenkins was freed directly from isolation rather than stepping down through general population.

A Portland lawyer [has claimed](#) that Maine residents with mental illness are being placed in solitary confinement after committing misdemeanor offenses. One individual spent ten days in isolation after calling 911 to ask for assistance in obtaining more medication for schizophrenia.

[The Coloradoan](#) has published a long-form piece exploring the placement of people with mental illness in solitary confinement cells in jails across the state.

A transgender Georgia woman, Ashley Diamond, has [allegedly served most of her sentence in solitary confinement](#) as a means to keep her safe from physical and sexual violence in the prison. Being placed in isolation has prevented Diamond from receiving life and employment counseling as well as recreation time. According to her lawyers, Diamond has also been denied female hormone treatment since her incarceration in 2012.

The Bureau of Prisons has [released a new policy](#) outlining how to evaluate, treat, and monitor individuals with mental illness at ADX Florence, and transferred some especially ill individuals to a recently-opened 30-bed unit in the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta. The changes may be in response to a federal lawsuit filed in 2012 which alleged that the prison violated the constitutional rights of individuals with mental illness.

[Rolling Stone](#) released an interview with Michael Alig, the 90s Club Kid who spent 17 years in prison after murdering and dismembering a drug dealer. In the interview, Alig discusses his struggles with substance misuse on the inside and the years he spent in solitary confinement.

The American Civil Liberties Union and Columbia Legal Services have [dropped a lawsuit](#) against the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, in which they alleged that detainees were placed in solitary confinement in retaliation for going on hunger strike. Attorneys stated that their demands had been met.

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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by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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