

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Campaign and Advocacy

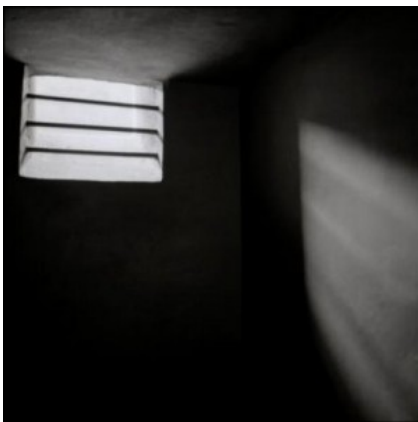
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by [Jean Casella](#) | June 8, 2014



On Monday, June 2, the New York City medical examiners office ruled the death of a man who died in a Rikers Island jail cell last fall to be a homicide. Bradley Ballard died of complications of diabetes along with the results of genital self-mutilation. [According to the Associated Press](#): Ballard, who family members said had been diagnosed as schizophrenic, was discovered lying in his own feces in a cell with a rubber band tied around his scrotum. He had been confined to his cell in a mental observation unit at Rikers for seven days for making a lewd gesture at a female guard. Documents obtained by the AP show Ballard was not given his medication for much of the time he spent locked in his cell in a mental observation unit. Ballard's death and the death of another inmate who died in an overheated cell have prompted a city lawmaker to schedule an oversight hearing. On Monday, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a new task force that would overhaul how the corrections system treats the mentally ill.

Reporting on the Federal District Court decision granting class-action status in a California lawsuit, Erica Goode [wrote in the New York Times](#): Legal experts say that the ruling, which allows inmates at Pelican Bay who have been held in solitary confinement for more than a decade to sue as a class, paves the way for a court case that could shape national policy on the use of long-term solitary confinement. The Times quotes Jules Lobel, president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, which brought the suit: This would really be the first case about whether the confinement itself is cruel and unusual punishment, Mr. Lobel said, and about who can be legitimately confined in this way, given the draconian nature of the confinement.'

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) released newly revised juvenile detention facility standards at its annual conference this week. As the [Juvenile Justice Information Exchange reported](#), the revised standards call for an end to the solitary confinement of children except as a short-term response to behavior that threatens a youth or others.

The [Augusta Free Press](#) reported on June 4: Attorneys for the ACLU and the ACLU of Virginia filed a friend-of-the-court brief today in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit on behalf of nine correctional experts, arguing that automatic solitary confinement for death row inmates is unconstitutional. All Virginia offenders who are sentenced to death are assigned to solitary confinement for the remainder of their lives or until their sentence is overturned. Typically, inmates serve at least six years in solitary while they pursue their appeals.

On June 5, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the class-action status of a lawsuit filed by the ACLU and the Prison Law Office, alleging that Arizona's prison system overuses solitary confinement and provides inadequate health care. As [Bob Ortega reported](#) in the *Arizona Republic*: The ruling essentially clears the way for the suit to go to trial in October. It also means that the more than 34,000 inmates in Arizona's 10 state-run prisons will be part of the suit, first filed in 2012, seeking wide-ranging changes in how the state's Department of Corrections confines inmates and treats or fails to treat their health- and mental-health-care problems.

On June 6, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper [signed into law](#) a bill that bans the placement of people with serious mental illness in solitary confinement in the state's prisons. [Some have warned](#), however, that the prison systems' narrow definitions of both major mental illness and solitary confinement allow many to slip through the cracks of these reforms. In addition, the new law [does not apply](#) to local jails.

A front-page [New York Times story](#) published on June 7 described the squalor and unconcern in which people with mental illness live in

the solitary confinement units at Mississippi's main facility for prisoners with psychiatric disabilities: Open fires sometimes burn unheeded in the solitary-confinement units of the East Mississippi Correctional Facility, a privately run state prison in Meridian. Inmates spend months in near-total darkness. Illnesses go untreated. Dirt, feces and, occasionally, blood are caked on the walls of cells. The story stands in sharp contrast to [another front-page story](#) by the same reporter, published in 2012, which featured Mississippi as a success story and praised its Corrections chief, Christopher Epps, for reducing the state's use of solitary. Epps is among the defendants named in the lawsuit against East Mississippi Correctional Facility, which was filed by the ACLU and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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Also on the above news of juvenile detention. If I was held to account for the mistakes in my teens I might be incarcerated now. It's known among science that during teens develop their HIGHER REASONING as they grow. Brain actually can be seen to change visually in scans. In a prison environment they're soaking up info like a sponge and they might make changes but will they implement them? I doubt it until there's a case in the media. That's compelling and equally revolting. I speak out of experience. They lock your door when they can't cope. Left me to think, I'm just a kid. When will this stop happening to me. j.

fall under the label of mental illness because I suffer panic attacks and anxiety which fill me with fear and paranoia. Had a severe one yesterday and thought THIS IS HOW the label ABJECT TORTURE solitary victims feel ALL THE TIME. Is it? Is that the way my penpal feels CONSTANTLY and can only get worse? I was incapacitated by my fear and have easy access to an understanding doc. And can look forward to weeks of health. Any tips on how I can slow this mental deterioration by means of pen and paper would be aces. He's been in under 6 years now. There's only so much hope you can install my friend is that 35 same as me. Bless. j.

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