

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/05/19/groups-urge-holder-to-clean-house-at-the-bureau-of-prisons/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | May 19, 2011

A group of civil liberties and criminal justice reform groups is calling for a change in direction at the federal Bureau of Prisons, following the retirement of BOP head Harley Lappin, appointed during the Bush Administration. Under Lappin, the BOP continued to grow, adding new prisons and prisoners at a rate even higher than that of the states, according to analyses by the [Sentencing Project](#) and the [Pew Center on the States](#). Since 1995 alone, the number of federal inmates has more than doubled, to over 211,000. More than half of these prisoners are serving time on drug charges, and another 10 percent are held on immigration violations. In all, more than 72 percent are nonviolent offenders with no history of violence, and 34 percent are first-time nonviolent offenders.

Yet, as we wrote recently, the BOPs FY 2012 budget request includes funds to open new maximum security prisons in Alabama and New Hampshire, and to acquire and renovate a new supermax prison in Thomson, Illinois, which would add and add up to 1,600 solitary confinement cells. It is in response to such plans that the consortium of groups is urging Attorney General Eric Holder to appoint a reformer who will take the BOP in a different direction. According to an [announcement issued by the 24 groups](#):

Two dozen more organizations have called on Attorney General Eric Holder to name a reformer to head the federal Bureau of Prisons. The position is vacant with the retirement of Harley Lappin. In a letter to Holder, groups including the American Civil Liberties Union, NAACP, and Sentencing Project urged the appointment of an individual with experience in systems reform and change. She or he must also have the courage and commitment to lower recidivism rates, improve conditions in BOP facilities, focus on rehabilitation and re-entry, and improve public safety through reforms in correctional practice and strategy.

The groups said that currently, the prison bureau functions at nearly 140% capacity where prisoners are warehoused, rather than rehabilitated, and both staff and prisoners are routinely put at risk due to dangerous conditions. Unfortunately, the agency has not adapted its management strategy to take full advantage of the diverse population reduction authorities and cost-savings measures given to it by Congress, such as: expanded half-way house placement, compassionate release, and sentence reduction programs like good time and drug program participation. The consequence of this inaction is that the BOP has grown more bloated and more dangerous over time. The American Bar Association, National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and Human Rights Watch made similar points to Holder in recent letters.



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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

@Dave The Prison Industry is bigger than walmart/gm and ford put together. We got rid of all our other industries and now we use our own people to make money. Some towns would not exist w/o a prison. Use isolation indiscriminately..costs more. Isn't making money from keeping people in chains Slavery? Generate public hysteria keeping the myth of murders rapists alive. They the COs instigate violence to justify pay hikes. Its Madness.

I know a man that has been parole ready for 20 years and denied every time random stupid reasons just recently denied again and lots other aging men the as a budget strategy take their meds away. you can click my website. I can not stress enough for people to wake up. these men parole ready are old and no threat yet they keep em they are no trouble the young violent go in and out because they dont want to deal w/ them, sickening travesty

Heres whats happened over the years: Politicians, in order to appear to actually give a damn about citizens, hype up crime such as murder, sex offenses, drug dealing, etc., and scare the daylights out of the average American. But they have a remedy, and it will keep America safe. They are no better than talk show hosts who go nuts on any hot topic and ride it straight in to the ground. The public at large believes this nonsense, and breathes a sigh of relief, figuring were safe thanks to the war on drugs and war on crime. Taxpayers are being fleeced by the astronomical cost of prisons, and prisons have become big business probably bigger than WalMart. Yes, the DOJ and BOP needs a complete house cleaning, as well as all the politicians. Its gone way too far, and unless new leadership is put in place, were going to read about more abuse.

I agree Janet yet elected officials keep the myth of murderers and rapists are in prison when its not what makes up the prison population. I am so sorry. And angry. Be sure to make your voice heard.

I have a son serving a 20 year for truly having a drug problem. Who needs help not put in a prison with harded criminals.

@Joshlyn I love your comments we really need as individuals to follow the lead of the groups in the article and let our voices be heard Holder is useless I have written him many times. Joshlyn I do not want to offend you but your comments and thoughts would have such a bigger impact if you used google spell check, I know what you are saying but I think your thoughts are wise but the spelling makes people ignore them, I wish I knew you I am always glad to see you here. if you click my name it will take u to one of my blogs where you can contact me if you like

yes the bop needs to clean up the crap they ben throwing round bout time still thow i dout much will be difrent may thare be light in the darknes of justice

Veterans Incarcerated can bring the change to this broken system help us bring this needed Faith-Based First Amendment Friendly John 14:12 Greater works will you do than I for I go to My Father

The War Widows  
Veterans Village B-2  
4401 Teller Street  
Wheat Ridge, CO 80033-3448

Can you help us identify how many are Military Veterans? Blessings

The War Widows  
[mmurphy@veteranschamberofcommerce.org](mailto:mmurphy@veteranschamberofcommerce.org)

This is news I did not know Lappin was going Do you know whos up for the job yet? I see all the groups are on it, I hope you guys put in your opinion as well

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News