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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | August 26, 2018

The Intercept [reported on](#) the use of solitary confinement as retaliation against organizers of the nationwide prison strike against the forced labor and inhumane conditions in prisons across the country that began on August 21. An incarcerated man in Ohio, Imam Hasan, reported being placed in solitary confinement last month for his role in organizing a work stoppage leading up to the strike. An organizer on the outside, Amani Sawari, said that incarcerated organizers in Florida and Texas prisons have also been placed in solitary confinement. She said, Prison officials are doing all they can to suppress the strike, but the match has already been lit and now the word is spreading like wildfire. Displacing select individuals is not enough.

CNN [investigated](#) the circumstances surrounding the May 2017 death of Jeancarlo Alfonso Jimenez Joseph at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility Stewart Detention Center, operated by private prison company CoreCivic in Georgia. Jimenez, a 27-year-old undocumented Panamanian who had been living in the U.S. for sixteen years, committed suicide in his solitary confinement cell after being denied mental health care, despite his documented history of schizophrenia, suicidal ideation, and multiple involuntary commitments. Though the Georgia Bureau of Investigation concluded there was no foul play in Jimenez's death, immigrant rights advocates said in a letter to lawmakers, He should have been receiving treatment, not been isolated and forgotten in solitary.

The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* [reported](#) that 23 men held at the Pulaski County Jail in Little Rock have filed a lawsuit against the facility, the sheriff, and jail staff, claiming that the conditions at the jail amount to solitary confinement and violate the 8th Amendment. The lawsuit says, We are forced to remain in our cells [for] hours and hours at a time without exercise, showers, or phone calls due to the shortage of staff at the facility. According to the lawsuit, the facility has only one deputy in charge of 140 or 150 detained individuals, which poses clear safety and health risks, but when the detained individuals seek help, they are threatened, maced and placed in the hole. The plaintiffs ask for monetary damages and class-action status in the lawsuit.

An [article](#) in *The Appeal* described the conditions in the Special Management Unit (SMU) at the federal USP Lewisburg in Pennsylvania, where incarcerated men routinely face solitary confinement, brutal mechanical restraints, and denial of mental health care. While the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) claimed, Solitary confinement does not exist in the federal prison system, the men held in the SMU only receive one hour a day out of their cells and some do not leave their cells for months at a time. Despite several lawsuits condemning the SMU as unconstitutional, the BOP announced it will transfer the SMU, along with its current associate warden, to a maximum-security federal prison in rural Illinois, AUSA Thomson, which has been nearly empty for two decades and was purchased from the state of Illinois several years ago. Advocates say this move does not solve the violations occurring at Lewisburg. An attorney who filed a lawsuit against Lewisburg administrators said, Housing people in unconstitutional conditions is unconstitutional, no matter the state.

The Department of Justice has begun an investigation into allegations of sexual abuse and violations of civil rights at Lowell Correctional Institution, a women's prison in Central Florida. Women have come forward in several different lawsuits since 2011, claiming that corrections officers forced them to perform sexual acts under the threat of solitary confinement, deprivation of basic hygienic items, denial of visitation, or withdrawal of good behavior time. [According](#) to the *Miami Herald*, the main officer accused was fired but never faced charges, while three other accused officers continue to work at the facility. An attorney representing several of the women said he continues to receive calls from women facing sexual exploitation at Lowell, but they don't want to come forward because, for girls in custody, they immediately get put in [solitary] confinement.

A group of immigrant mothers, held at the Port Isabel Detention Center, an ICE facility in Texas, filed a complaint alleging immigration officers separated them from their children and subjected them to abusive treatment, intimidation, and solitary confinement. When the women told a visiting White House official that they still had no information about their children's whereabouts and had been denied communication with their children for over a month, ICE officers punished them with solitary, [according](#) to *Texas Monthly*. One woman said, I was handcuffed and put in solitary confinement for ten days. I was put in a dark room, so I did not know when it was day or night. I was not given food or water for about three days. They did not give me toilet paper. The complaint calls on the Department of Homeland Security to investigate the women's allegations.

Q13 Fox [reported](#) that King County (Seattle), Washington, has agreed to eliminate the use of solitary confinement as punishment for

juveniles in the custody of its Regional Justice Center in Kent, as part of the settlement of a lawsuit brought by four teenage boys who had been charged as adults and held in solitary at the facility. In addition to the county's ban on solitary for juveniles, the county executive has called for a goal of zero detention for youth, after a recent county report found that children of color made up 83 percent of youth charged as adults last year in King County (which is more than 65 percent white). The county agreed to pay over \$50,000 to each of the plaintiffs who had been held in solitary at the jail.

Many of this week's [tributes](#) to Senator John McCain made mention of the two years he spent in solitary confinement while a prisoner of war in Vietnam. Although McCain also endured extreme physical abuse, deprivation, and medical neglect during the interrogations conducted by North Vietnamese officers, he would later write: It's an awful thing, solitary. It crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance more effectively than any other form of mistreatment. During his 35 years serving in Congress, he spoke out against solitary confinement and so-called enhanced interrogation techniques, both of which he considered torture.

Valerie Kiebal was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in The Root, Truthout, the Chicago Reporter, and Shadowproof.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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