

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2016/06/23/dying-to-live-hunger-strike-in-wisconsin-prison-protests-indefinite-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Sarah Blatt-Herold](#) | June 23, 2016

Update, 5 pm: Based on court records, [Wisconsin Watch](#) is reporting that three men are now being force-fed as the hunger strike enters its third week. They include LaRon McKinley Bey and Cesar De Leon at Waupun Correctional Institution and Prince Aturn-Ra Uhuru Mutawakki/Norman C. Green at Columbia Correctional Institution, who has been in isolation for eighteen years.

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LaRon McKinley Bey has been in solitary confinement in Wisconsin's prison system for [over twenty-seven years](#). He spends at least 23 hours a day alone in a closet-sized, [insect-infested](#) cell, his meals slid through a slot in the cell's solid steel door.

In a [lawsuit](#) filed in April, [McKinley Bey](#) asserts that he has been unable to go outside, unable to interact meaningfully with others and unable to access adequate mental health care. He and others have been subjected to cold showers and have suffered from what Harvard psychiatrist [Stuart Grassian](#) calls the delirium often caused by solitary confinement.

On June 10th, McKinley Bey joined at least six other men incarcerated at Waupun Correctional Institution in a hunger strike, which they call Dying to Live. Hunger striker Cesar De Leon began refusing food on June 5th. Due to what he believes are lead and copper in the prison's water, De Leon has also been refusing water to avoid illness. His request for bottled water, at first denied, was recently fulfilled.

The strike is being held to protest prison policies specifically, the use of indefinite solitary confinement in administrative segregation units. The men have resolved to refuse food until prison officials meet [six demands](#).

Among the strikers' demands are an end to indefinite solitary confinement, increased oversight over the use of solitary in Wisconsin state prisons, and increased access to medical health care in solitary.

According to Bernie Gonzalez of the faith-based Wisconsin organization WISDOM, Cesar De Leon, who has now been refusing food for 18 days, was delivered a court order on June 17th informing him that he may be force-fed. Gonzalez told Solitary Watch that WISDOM hopes he is not force-fed, a dangerous practice that may damage his digestive tract. The ACLU of Wisconsin condemns force-feeding [competent](#) prisoners, a condemnation further supported by international law.

In a statement made to [Wisconsin Watch's](#) Dee J. Hall, spokesperson for the Wisconsin Department of Corrections Tristan Cook said that the duration of time an individual can spend in solitary for a disciplinary infraction has recently been reduced from 360 days to 90 days.

Cook further stated that Wisconsin has also instituted step-down programs to aid individuals in returning to the general population after prolonged isolation and begun to review the placement of people with mental illness in solitary confinement.

However, according to WISDOM's Bernie Gonzalez, we have yet to hear from the DOC in direct response to the hunger strikers' demands.

In a letter to Jon Litscher, secretary of the Wisconsin DOC, the Coalition for Support of Prisoners points out three rules that have been changed since 1990 that adversely impact incarcerated individuals. Among these is the fact that in 1990, an individual must have been recently violent to be placed in administrative confinement, but today a mere history of violence is sufficient. It does not appear that the Wisconsin DOC has any intention of reversing such alterations.

As a result, the reforms implemented or planned by the Wisconsin DOC are unlikely to affect men like LaRon McKinley Bey, who was placed in indefinite Administrative Segregation after shooting a corrections officer in an escape attempt nearly three decades ago. On the website [Dying to Live](#), McKinley Bey writes that he believes he should not be judged solely by actions from his distant past, and no longer needs to be held in extreme isolation.

[WISDOM](#) continues to support the hunger strikers. Solitary confinement is a moral issue, Gonzalez told Solitary Watch. Its not right.

Californias Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity (PHSS) also stands in solidarity with the participants, expressing disappointment that the men in Wisconsin must [starve themselves to be heard](#). Thousands of incarcerated people in California went on hunger strike three times, and also filed a lawsuit, before significant solitary reforms were made in that state.

Sarah Blatt-Herold was a research and reporting intern for Solitary Watch. She also tutored in Massachusetts prisons and worked with Black and Pink and Brooklyn Defender Services. She currently attends Harvard Law School.

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

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Does anyone have any idea or communication from hunger strikers at Green Bay Correctional Facility? Who is on strike? I would like to post on Samizdat: Socialist Prisoners Project and Save the Kids from Incarceration and get letters of solidarity out to the strikers.

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