

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | November 10, 2021

[Testimony](#) from Black and Pink Massachusetts (MA) explains the need for a bill pending in the state legislature that increases safety for LGBTQI people and people living with HIV who are incarcerated in Massachusetts. LGBTQ people are disproportionately subjected to solitary confinement, and the Rehabilitation Including Guaranteed Health, Treatment and Safety (RIGHTS) Act would, among other measures, protect LGBTQ people from restrictive housing by prohibiting solitary confinement as punishment for physical contact between people, among other related protections.

Michele Deitch [writes](#) for the Brennan Center for Justice's Punitive Excess [series](#) about the need for independent oversight of prisons, jails, and other detention facilities. [M]ost of the Western world has recognized that the protection of human rights in prisons demands transparency and the routine monitoring of conditions, writes Deitch but in the United States, [p]risons and jails are among the most opaque public institutions in our society. Although Deitch admits that monitoring bodies cannot make correctional administrators dismantle systems of solitary confinement or reduce racial tensions, she illustrates how they can provide the vital transparency needed to affect prison policy.

MY North West [reports](#) that the private prison giant, the GEO group, has been ordered to pay \$23.2 million for failing to pay the minimum wage to detainees who worked at an ICE detention center in Tacoma, Washington. Workers alleged that the facility has faced numerous accusations in the past, for keeping people in indefinite solitary confinement and inadequately providing medical care. In April of 2020 there were three, several hundred person hunger strikes, and 50 people inside the facility spelled out the letters SOS in the yard. This ruling was the first time that a state had ever sued a for-profit prison on behalf of minimum wage for incarcerated people.

Anastasia Reesa Tomkin [writes](#) in Nonprofit Quarterly about the importance of ensuring labor rights for incarcerated people. She discusses the work of Vidal Guzman, a man who was imprisoned at the age of 16 and held in solitary confinement for a total of two and a half years. Currently, he is working to amend the 13th Amendment, which includes the words, Slavery prohibited except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted. He describes receiving meager paychecks for working full days while in prison, and being threatened with solitary confinement when he protested.

Mayor-elect of New York City Eric Adams offered his support for current mayor Bill de Blasio's order to lift a ban on solitary confinement at Rikers Island, suggesting that he plans to support the continued use of solitary confinement in New York City, [reports](#) NY Daily News. In an interview with PIX11, Adams said, We can do the solitary aspect of this in a humane way, but you can't continue to put dangerous inmates back in the same housing areas where they are attacking innocent officers and those prisoners who are trying to serve their time. Advocates, survivors and those who have lost loved ones in solitary insist that solitary does not make Rikers safer. A recent [article](#) in The City criticizes Adams' history of prioritizing correctional officials and his financial connection to a lobbying firm that represents the union of corrections staff in city jails.

A trial began on November 1st in Phoenix in a class-action lawsuit that was originally filed in 2012 against the Arizona Department of Corrections, [reports](#) AZ Central. The lawsuit stems from decade-long allegations that private prison healthcare contractors have provided dangerously inadequate care to people in the Arizona prison system. The Department of Corrections began contracting out the provision of medical care in prisons in 2012 as a way to save money, but accusations of abuse have been made against all three companies that the state has contracted with. In 2014, the state agency settled this case on the eve of trial, but problems have persisted, including claims that people are still being held in solitary confinement in lieu of mental health care. One man who was isolated this way stated, They are trying to cut corners and save money, rather than give us the medications we need.

The Marshall Project [reports](#) on what prison administrators and officials in multiple states describe as a staffing crisis. Amid a national labor shortage and dangerous conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, prison staffing has been affected and administrators link these staffing shortages to worse conditions. Restrictions on activities that were put into place to stop the spread of COVID are still in place and the result is to force those in general population into de facto solitary confinement, and those already in segregation into near-total lockdown. One man incarcerated in Illinois described, I feel very overwhelmed I can't talk about my problems to anyone. I pace back and forth and talk to myself because there's nothing else to do.

Angela Davis, the anti-prison activist who herself spent time in solitary confinement, published [an op-ed](#) in the Chicago Tribune in support of legislation to sharply limit solitary in Illinois. (Behind paywall)

Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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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