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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | June 17, 2018

39-year-old Marco Antonio Muoz, a Honduran husband and father, committed suicide last month in a solitary confinement cell, after Border Patrol agents took away his three-year-old son. Muoz and his family were applying for asylum at the border when they were informed that the family would be separated. An agent [recalled](#), in a *Washington Post* article, that Muoz lost it and they had to use physical force to take the child out of his hands. Border Patrol subsequently placed him in solitary confinement at Starr County Jail in Rio Grande City, Texas, 40 miles away from his family. The next morning, Muoz was found dead in his cell, with a noose around his neck.

[According](#) to 10News, two individuals formerly held at Otay Mesa Detention Center, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in San Diego operated by the private prison company CoreCivic, filed a class action lawsuit, claiming that the detention center forced individuals in its custody to work for nearly nothing in its Dollar-A-Day labor program. The plaintiffs claim that they were threatened with solitary confinement if they did not participate in this voluntary work program. While CoreCivic denies the allegations, a federal judge has ordered the case to move forward.

The Daily Gazette published an [editorial](#) urging New York State to limit the use of solitary confinement in its prisons, and challenging readers to subject themselves to the isolation of solitary: This weekend, go in your bathroom or another small room in your house. Cover the window with thick paper except for a six-by-eight inch rectangle. Turn off the lights, and sit there for 23 hours in a row. No talking on your cell phone. No communicating with your spouse or kids. Just sit there on the floor in the dark and deal with it. The New York Assembly recently passed the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, which would limit the states use of solitary confinement and prohibit its use on vulnerable populations. The article calls for the Senate to pass the bill before the legislative session ends this month.

The Juvenile Justice Information Exchange published an [article](#) citing the danger of normalizing the use of solitary confinement on youth. The author, who has spent 23 years working in the juvenile justice and mental health systems, claimed that the use of solitary confinement is a lazy substitute for effective rehabilitative methods, such as written assignments, timeout (15 minutes or less), mediation, individualized plans, and mentorship. The article states, The intended goal of juvenile justice facilities is to provide a safe and secure environment that is conducive for rehabilitation. The use of solitary confinement, on the contrary, moves the facilitys pendulum from rehabilitation to debilitation. Solitary confinement should be removed from all juvenile justice facilities intervention continuums.

WFDD [reported](#) that Central Prison in Raleigh, North Carolina, violated the state Department of Public Safety's suicide prevention policy by placing a mentally ill man in solitary confinement for an extended period of time. Reporter Taylor Knopf from *North Carolina Health News* has followed the case of the man, Devon Davis, whose mental health deteriorated during a 154-day-stay in solitary at the prison. Knopf explained, That does irreversible damage to the brain that some psychiatrists say they cant theyre not sure they can successfully help someone like that return to any sort of normal mental health status.

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* [reported](#) that 48-year-old Dan Vasalech settled his lawsuit this week, after disputing his 45-day solitary confinement sentence at Allegheny County Jail in Pennsylvania. Vasalech said he had been placed in isolation allegedly making an insensitive remark by complaining about the jail being locked down solely so that the corrections officers could attend the funeral of another officer. Though the jail provided no evidence or testimony at the hearing, the sergeant found Vasalech guilty on three counts: disruption of routine, disrespect to the staff and inciting a riot. Vasalech's lawyer called for the last charge to be dismissed and for Vasalech to be released from solitary confinement after he had served 30 days, which has been following the settlement agreement.

The *Houston Chronicle* [revealed](#) a quota system, established on March 10 of this year, requiring each prison officer in certain Texas facilities to submit two cases of Unauthorized Storage of Property daily without exception, allegedly in the interest of preparing for audits. Though the quota system was abandoned weeks later, the *Houston Chronicle* conducted an investigation of the system, finding that over 500 disciplinary cases across Texas prisons had already been falsified in an attempt to fill the quota. In one instance, at the Ramsey Unit, a mother claimed that prison officers set up her son by placing two screwdrivers in his cell. Four officers were fired in connection with that incident. While the article did not specify how many of the false disciplinary charges resulted in solitary

confinement, it noted that the abolition of punitive solitary confinement in Texas has not prevented its use for security reasons.

Valerie Kiebala 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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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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