

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | May 6, 2019

The *Sacramento Bee* [published](#) recently released footage from 2017 of corrections officers brutally assaulting a man with psychiatric disabilities, while he was being held in a suicide watch cell at the Auburn Main Jail in Placer County, California. The video, which officials initially withheld from the public, at one point shows eight officers piled on top of 28-year-old Beau Bangert before he is left alone in the cell, bloody and restrained with a spit mask over his face. Bangert was awarded \$300,000, as the lead plaintiff for a class action lawsuit that the county settled for a total of \$1.4 million. Three corrections officials were fired as a result of the incident, but Bangerts attorney said he is not confident that the county has reformed their jails and said we are auditing their response to claims of use of force and excessive force.

The *New York Daily News* [reported](#) that New York City settled a lawsuit for \$3.5 million with the partner of Rolando Perez, a man with epilepsy who died at age 35 in 2015 while being held in solitary confinement on Rikers Island. While in solitary, Perez was repeatedly denied the medication necessary to control his seizures, which he had taken since his teenage years. His death led to one corrections officer being fired, and the following year, the New York City jails ended their contract with the private health care company Corizon and began working with the city's Health and Hospitals Corporation instead. No matter how much money it is, it can never bring my sons father back, said Perez's partner, Alexis Rodriguez. This was about how they treated Rolando. I don't want anybody else to be treated the same way.

As the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act acquired a majority of support in both houses of the New York State legislature, the *Albany Times Union* published an [op-ed](#) written by the parents of Ben Van Zandt, a young man with mental illness who committed suicide at age 21 after suffering the trauma of solitary confinement. New York's leaders are responsible for our sons death, the wrote Alicia Barraza and Doug Van Zandt, and they alone can end the abhorrent use of incarceration to respond to mental illness, and the torture of solitary confinement. A Human Rights Watch [memo](#) supporting the HALT Solitary Confinement Act noted that New York currently holds about 3,400 people disproportionately people of color in solitary on a given day. The legislation, if passed, would limit the use of solitary to fifteen days and ban the placement of youth and people with psychiatric disabilities in solitary.

*City & State New York* published an [op-ed](#) written by New York State Senator Luis Sepúlveda, who is the primary sponsor of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act in the Senate. Highlighting the implementation of effective and humane alternatives to solitary as an essential aspect of the bill, Sepúlveda points to the Resolve to Stop Violence Project in San Francisco. That program engages incarcerated people for twelve hours a day through therapeutic and rehabilitative programming, including academic classes, workshops, individual counseling and restorative practices, and resulted in a 96 percent drop in violent incidents in the unit. Sepúlveda believes that passing the HALT Solitary Confinement Act would lead to the development of similar programs in New York aimed at addressing the reasons [incarcerated people] needed to be separated in the first place.

[According](#) to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Georgias DeKalb County Sheriff, Jeffrey Mann, denies claims that people held in the county jail face guard brutality, solitary confinement, inadequate medical care, and retaliation for speaking out. Recent posts on social media called attention to the conditions at the jail, including a black mold infestation, with photos of people in the jail holding signs saying things like, Please help, we dying, need food. Mann dismissed the grievances, claiming that people in the jail had not gone through the formal procedure for filing complaints. A spokesperson for the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee said, Despite our attempts to contact jail officials, it seems everyone has tried to avoid taking responsibility and/or answering questions.

[According](#) to *Documented*, immigrants held at Essex County Correctional Facility in New Jersey, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility, have been denied adequate medical attention and have been placed in solitary confinement, in violation of ICE standards. A 2018 Department of Homeland Security investigation found alarming conditions at the facility, including the lack of recreation, unsanitary showers, rotting food, and a loaded gun near a detained immigrant. *Documented* revealed immigrant grievances expressing fear for their lives due to the lack of medical attention and mental health services. The facility has recorded placing 60 immigrants on suicide watch since 2015, which the policy director at Detention Watch Network said, looks exactly like solitary confinement it looks like isolation and exacerbates the problem.

The *Arizona Republic* [reported](#) that the Arizona Correctional Peace Officers Association and Middle Ground Prison Reform came together last week to demand changes to the states prison system. Following the death of an incarcerated person at Lewis Prison in Maricopa County due to unrepaired, broken locks on cell doors, lawmakers called for the removal of the head of Arizonas Department of Corrections, Charles Ryan. Violence reportedly rose by nearly 50 percent over the past decade in the Arizona prison system, which holds thousands of people in solitary confinement and faces persistent staffing shortages. A former corrections officer said, This is the first time that staff, inmates, families are saying, You know? The hell with that little code [of silence] you have. People are dying.

WGXA [reported](#) that both houses of the Georgia legislature had passed a bill that would ban shackling pregnant women and prohibit their placement in solitary confinement across the states prison system. Pamela Winn, the founder of RestoreHER, said the bill is very personal to her, recalling her miscarriage after she fell in shackles and was kept in solitary confinement during her federal prison sentence. Theyre already locked up, community member Waldra Tyler said, And when youre pregnant you go through a lot of things, and having shackles and things of that nature, its inhumane. The bill now awaits the signature of Governor Brian Kemp.

CT News Junkie [reported](#) that a bill has been introduced into the Connecticut legislature that would remove children from adult prisons, transfer them to secure rehabilitative facilities, and prohibit the use of solitary confinement for youth. An Office of the Child Advocate report released earlier this year found that youth faced solitary confinement for up to 23-and-a-half hours a day, and that boys held at Manson Youth Institution received no mental health screening and little to no programming. At a recent public hearing, one Bridgeport resident said, The one hour of productivity they are allotted a day in which you are expected to shower and make phone calls sends the message that theres nothing better our children could be doing to better themselves and the scope of their communities, and thats simply not true.

[According](#) to *Courthouse News Service*, the federal Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit ruled in favor of three men held on Virginias death row. The men had sued the Department of Corrections in 2014 for holding them in conditions of solitary confinement, with only one hour outside for five days a week and one shower three days a week. The court found that the plaintiffshad been subject to cruel and unusual punishment and that the state was deliberately indifferent to the psychological harm caused by isolating the men. In his opinion, Judge James Wynn cited reports from the three men describing the paranoia, hallucinations, and sleeping disorders resulting from their time in solitary confinement.

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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