

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2009/12/30/ny-prisons-open-unit-for-mentally-ill/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | December 30, 2009

Two years after litigation forced it to take action, the New York State corrections department is opening a small, dedicated unit for mentally ill offenders. Likethousands of othersacross the country, residents of this unit are likely to have been held in solitary confinement, which is currently the U.S. prison systems treatment of choice for inmates whose mental illnesses make them difficult to control, especially without proper treatment.

New York State admits that over 7,000 of its 53,000 prisoners are mentally ill, with more than 2,000 of them suffering from serious mental illness; of these, it says, about 200 were being held in solitary.

From the [Adirondack \(NY\) Daily Enterprise/AP](#):

The first inmates moved Tuesday into a new state prison unit for disruptive mentally ill prisoners that was created in response to a lawsuit filed by an advocacy group in 2002.

The 100-bed Residential Mental Health Unit at Marcy Correctional Facility in Oneida County was designed by the state corrections and mental health agencies under the terms of a 2007 settlement with Disability Advocates.

The nonprofit group sued to improve treatment of mentally ill prisoners and to stop putting inmates with serious mental illness and disciplinary issues in solitary confinement.

The lawsuit said isolation and idleness led to severe psychiatric deterioration in these isolation units, including acts of self-mutilation and even suicide.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

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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