

# 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](#) | January 14, 2018

*The Nation* published an [article](#) about the case of Sharqawi Al Hajj, a man from Yemen who has been held in Guantanamo Bay for 15 years without charge. The article references a federal judges findings that, during his detention at Guantanamo Bay, Al Hajj suffered patent physical and psychological coercion, including, as Al Hajjs lawyer wrote, regular beatings, threats of electrocution, prolonged isolation, complete darkness, [and] ear-splitting sound. Al Hajj, along with 10 other individuals who have been held without charge at Guantanamo Bay, brought a new case to federal district court in Washington, D.C., this week, claiming their detention has extended beyond the era of hostilities, proving it arbitrary and unlawful.

*The Intercept* [reported](#) that 24-year-old Bangladeshi immigrant Shoaib Ahmed was placed in solitary confinement at Stewart Detention Center in Georgia, run by private contractor CoreCivic, for 10 days as punishment for encouraging a work stoppage in a labor program that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) claims to be voluntary. Ahmed, who is fleeing political persecution in his country, described the conditions of isolation at Stewart, recalling, Sometimes I think the segregation will kill me. Several immigrants held in various ICE detention centers have recently alleged that they have been forced to work for often as little as \$1 a day, against ICE standards, and have been threatened with solitary confinement if they refuse to work or encourage others to refuse.

The *Houston Chronicle* [reported](#) that 2017 was the deadliest year in nearly a decade for individuals held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers, with 12 detainee deaths. A recent investigation from the Department of Homeland Securitys Office of the Inspector General (OIG) revealed medical neglect and the use of solitary confinement may have contributed to the high death toll, and, according to non-profit immigration groups, potentially contributed to suicides and even deaths attributed to natural causes. In 2013, Clemente Mponda, who was being held in isolation at a Houston detention center, allegedly overdosed on medication after experiencing eight months of solitary confinement, despite his history of mental illness.

Three individuals filed a lawsuit this week against officials at the Bristol County Jail in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, claiming that they were placed in solitary confinement without adequate mental health treatment, despite their documented histories of mental illness. [According](#) to the *Boston Globe*, the lawsuit calls for an end to solitary confinement for individuals with mental illness, a development of alternatives to solitary confinement for those with mental illness, and an implementation of mental health evaluations upon individuals arrival at the jail. The lawsuit states that Bristol county jails have seen twice as many suicides as any other Massachusetts county jail and three times as many as national jails, with two of the 2016 suicides occurring in solitary confinement.

[According](#) to the *Wisconsin State Journal*, Jacob Bailey filed a federal lawsuit last month against staff at the Wisconsin juvenile facilities Lincoln Hill School for Boys and Copper Lake School for Girls, seeking \$75,000 for alleged mistreatment he experienced from guards at the facility. Bailey claims that, in 2014, guards kept him in solitary confinement, allegedly for possession of a screw that was never found, sexually assaulted him, and physically assaulted him, resulting in a broken arm that was not diagnosed or treated until a week later. The lawsuit claims that Baileys experience constituted child abuse and caused emotional and physical injury. Amid several allegations of abusive treatment against juveniles at the facility, Governor Scott Walker has announced a plan to close the facilities, opening an adult prison in their place and six new juvenile facilities across the state.

A transgender man, a gender non-conforming person, and two queer females, all Hispanic individuals currently or formerly held at Central California Womens Facility in Chowchilla, have filed a federal lawsuit against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation seeking damages for alleged abuse, sexual humiliation, and sexual harassment. The *Merced Sun Star* [reported](#) that three of the individuals were placed in solitary confinement for 12 hours without restroom access, food, water, or medical attention. When one of the women was taken out of the isolation cell, a guard ordered her to change her clothes in front of a male officer. When she requested privacy, the guard threatened her with solitary confinement and forced her to the ground, causing her to hit her face on a toilet.

Resolution [HB 795](#) was introduced to the Virginia legislature this week, which would mandate restrictions on solitary confinement, such as prohibiting solitary confinement for any member of a vulnerable population, including individuals under the age of 21, individuals over the age of 55, individuals with mental illness, individuals with serious medical conditions, pregnant women, individuals with auditory or visual impairment, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex individuals. The bill would prohibit solitary

confinement longer than 15 days for any individual and would require the Department of Corrections to provide an annual report on their use of solitary confinement. *MoveOn.org* members have circulated a [petition](#) in support of the bill, calling for solitary confinement to be reduced to an absolute minimum.

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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

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