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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](#) | March 9, 2020

NBC4 [reported](#) that the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC), a federal jail in New York City, was locked down for over a week while officials searched for a gun that had allegedly been smuggled into the jail by an officer. The gun was found late last Thursday in an individuals cell, but the Chief of the Federal Defenders Office, David Patton, said the lockdown violated the rights of the people held at MCC. Patton said many people were locked down in their cells 24 hours a day for those eight days, denied phone access, denied showers, denied legal visits, and only received cold food through their doors. Its worse than solitary confinement, Patton said, and the BOP just doesnt give a damn. Patton said the lockdown was a result of pure incompetence and a total lack of concern for the constitutional rights and humane conditions for people held at the facility.

The Justice Collaborative dedicated its last [webinar](#) in the Blueprint Series to discussing solitary confinement, its historical context, and how to end its use. The webinar featured Solitary Watch staff writer and editor Katie Rose Quandt, formerly incarcerated organizer and Legal Services for Prisoners with Children paralegal Ken Oliver, and civil rights attorney Anne Butterfield Weills. After Oliver described his own experience in solitary confinement, he said, Sometimes we forget the power that weve given the state, and we forget the fact that weve built these kind of invisible walls to deal with these people that we like to consider to be invisible. Once they go behind the wall, we kind of forget theyre there, and its somebody elses problem. In the meantime, weve given some people a lot of power to do a lot of things to this invisible population.

Rewire.News [told](#) the story of Tuesday Olson, a woman held at La Plata County Jail in Colorado for a traffic violation. Olson was pregnant at the time of her arrest and repeatedly informed correctional officers of pain and bleeding. Rather than providing immediate medical care, they responded by placing her in solitary confinement on a pad count. Olson was in fact suffering from an ectopic pregnancy, a condition that can end fatally. After medics operated on Olson, she was returned to solitary confinement at the jail, despite her depression from the failed pregnancy. Another woman, Diana Sanchez, was forced to give birth alone in solitary confinement in 2018 at the Denver County Jail. An OB-GYN, Dr. Carolyn Sufrin, explained, Theres no mandatory standards. Theres no mandatory system of oversight. So [state prisons and local jails] can provide high quality care, and some of them do, or they can provide abysmal, neglectful, unqualified care.

The *Commercial Appeal* [reported](#) that Erik Honeycutt filed a lawsuit against the private health care company Wellpath, claiming that Shelby County jail medical staff caused his grand mal seizure by providing him the wrong medication. After Honeycutt lost consciousness and received medical care at a hospital, the Tennessee jails staff placed him in solitary confinement on suicide watch, without blankets, towels, or his glasses. The lawsuit claims Honeycutts odd behavior and mood swings were interpreted as behavior warranting segregation rather than medical care, and [he] was forced to remain in segregated custody in a cell overflowing with sewage for days. The lawsuit, among dozens of others filed against the health care company, asks for \$1 million in damages and court costs.

The *Marshall Project* published an [account](#) written by Lyle Wesley Andrews, a 38-year-old incarcerated writer, about living in solitary confinement at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Tennessee. Andrews describes living in the unit adjacent to the Death House, which holds individuals condemned to death, along with the execution chamber. From his cell, Andrews recalls witnessing one mans last days before he was executed. Even though Andrews said he first felt no sympathy for the man based on his conviction, he said, Still, it never gets easier to be here in solitary confinement, watching people walk to their deaths outside of my eight-inch window. According to Andrews, he has been held at Riverbend for a year and a half, and during this time, six more people have been executed in the Death House.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) [reported](#) that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit denied a motion from the private prison company CoreCivic, calling for the dismissal of a lawsuit on behalf of detained immigrants demanding an end to the forced labor program at Stewart Detention Center in Georgia. The lawsuit claims that CoreCivic illegally forced immigrants to work for nearly no pay, under the threat of solitary confinement and often denying basic human needs. Ruling in favor of the lawsuit moving forward, the Court affirmed today that private detention companies like CoreCivic can be held to account for operating exploitative forced labor schemes, said Meredith Stewart, an attorney with SPLC.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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