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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](#) | July 1, 2019

The Advocate [reported](#) on the release of a report by Solitary Watch, the ACLU of Louisiana, and the Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University New Orleans, which reflects the survey responses of 709 people in solitary confinement in Louisiana state prisons. Over 77 percent who responded said that they had been held in solitary for over a year, and 43 percent said they had never left their cells while isolated. Albert Woodfox, who spent over 40 years in solitary confinement in Louisiana before he was released in 2016. Woodfox told *The Advocate*: [Solitary] is the most non-physical form of torture that can be imposed on one human being by another. The report called for strict limits on the use of solitary confinement and offered recommendations that included more education, improved mental health care, pathways out of solitary, and access to family contact. A spokesperson for the states corrections department denounced the report and pointed to recent improvements. Links to additional media coverage of the reports release, including a launch event on June 25 in New Orleans, can be found [here](#).

The Stop Solitary for Kids Campaign released a [report](#) last week, directing youth correctional administrators to safe alternatives to room confinement, the term often used for periods of solitary confinement in youth facilities. The report features models and developments from four different jurisdictions: Colorado, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Memphis, Tennessee. Highlights from these models included culture changes based on adolescent development research, enhanced staff training and increased staffing ratios, therapy programs based on behavior management research, and monitored reviews of incident footage. In Massachusetts, the Department of Youth Services decreased room confinement by at least 65 percent between 2008 and 2016, and during that time, assaults and suicidal behavior also dropped. The Assistant Chief of the Shelby County Sheriffs Office in Tennessee said, It hurt me so much to see children in rooms like that. Room confinement causes mental illness. You're teaching violence when you use force.

The ACLU released an updated report, [Still Worse Than Second-Class: Solitary Confinement of Women in the United States](#), documenting the continued struggle women face in solitary confinement in prisons and jails across the country, since the original report was released in 2014. The report laid out the specific effects of solitary confinement on women, including triggering past traumas, endangering the health of pregnant women and damaging mothers relationships with their children. In its discussion of women with mental illness held in isolation, the report cited a woman who experienced severe psychosis during her 21 days in solitary. She described not knowing her own name or gender and dancing completely naked in front of guards, who gathered to watch for entertainment and would encourage her to continue, instead of treating her psychosis. Its a culture problem, she said. The report listed steps forward that various states have taken, and provided recommendations for ensuring incarcerated women are not subjected to the torture of solitary confinement.

The *Arizona Republic* published an [article](#) detailing the continued placement of people with severe psychiatric disability in solitary confinement with inadequate care, despite a 2014 settlement mandating that the states department of corrections provide proper care to people in its custody. Director of the ACLU National Prison Project David Fathi called the states stubborn noncompliance unprecedented. Charlene Schwickrath said that her son, who had been in and out of mental health institutions, ended up in the supermax unit at Eyman Prison, while serving a 37-year sentence for robbery and assault. Schwickrath said her son had severely deteriorated both physically and mentally after his time in solitary, and during a visit, she found he had become convinced that the prison was using a torture machine to read his thoughts, saying Im going to have to them remove me from my body. She said, I felt like I was watching him go insane and that I was the only one who was paying attention. Data released in May found that 65 people have committed suicide in the states custody since 2010, and seven people have already died by suicide this year.

WHNT [reported](#) that at least five men held at Limestone Correctional Facility in Alabama went on hunger strike June 14. Organizers in support of the incarcerated men held a demonstration on visitation day, calling for six demands: a Department of Justice (DOJ) lawsuit challenging 8th Amendment violations, the removal of corrupt prison administrators, no new prisons, an end to the abusive use of solitary confinement, an end to retaliation, and the implementation of rehabilitative and good time programs. According to lead organizer Mona, one of the incarcerated hunger strikers was granted his demand to be transferred to a different facility.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) [reported](#) that New Jersey Senator Cory Booker sent a letter to the Republican Senate Judiciary Committee chair Lindsey Graham calling for an oversight hearing to examine egregious and appalling

abuses in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. The abuses were documented in a recent investigation by ICIJ, NBC News, *The Intercept*, and Univision. Booker pointed to the investigations findings that thousands of immigrants with mental illness had been placed in isolation, and said, It appears ICE has been consistently violating its own policy. Bookers letter follows a letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to ICE two weeks ago, calling for answers and information about the placement of immigrants in solitary confinement.

The City [reported](#) that the New York City Board of Correction is considering implementing new rules to restrict the use of solitary in jails, after transgender woman Layleen Polanco died in isolation at Rikers Island last month. The new rules would ban the use of punitive segregation for longer than fifteen days and require that people held in solitary be allowed out of their cells for at least four hours a day. The City Council Speaker and the Council Criminal Justice Committee Chair called on theboard to conduct a review of solitary confinement with an aim toward ending the practice and institute policies modeled after the unsuccessful state bill, the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act. While the correctional officers union opposes restricting solitary, Polancos sister said, Its not okay for them to put us in a box like we are a thinglike they put my sister. She was not a thing, she was a human.

The *Star-Ledger* published an [editorial](#), callong New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy to sign the recently passed bill that would limit the use of solitary confinement to twenty days at a time. The editorial board points to a man who was released after spending over ten years in solitary and shot up a Trenton art festival last year. The man died in the crossfire but had testified to the damage of solitary confinement. He said, Your emotion is just up and down. Youre angry, sad, mad. Youre all over the place, because youre in the call all day, pacing. The governor has not yet stated whether he will sign the bill into law, which the article calls plainly unsettling. Former Gov. Chris Christie vetoed a similar bill in 2016 under the disproven claim that solitary does not exist in New Jersey. According to ACLU attorney Tess Borden, about 1,500 people are held in solitary across the state on any given day.

The Vera Institute of Justice released a [policy brief](#) last week examining step-down programs and transitional units as reform tools to reduce the time people spend in long-term solitary confinement. The brief broke down key aspects necessary for successful step-down programs, including conditions that differ significantly from solitary, meaningful out-of-cell group programming and activities, a clear process for progression, and carefully planned transitions out of solitary. A significant component of the process was listed as frequent, transparent reviews from mental health workers, case managers, and security staff. The guide also noted that people should be moved to general population in the shortest time safely possible and warned against potential risks, such as programs that revert to a cycle of returning to solitary or programs that lack the staff and resources to provide the necessary programming and reviews.

The *Idaho Statesman* published an [article](#) depicting the dilemma that people with particularly severe psychiatric disabilities face in Idaho, where no safe and secure facility currently exists for them despite the 2017 Secure Treatment Facility Act, giving a green light to the Southwest Idaho Treatment Center (SWITC) to establish such housing. An as result, some people with severe mental illness are housed in the states maximum-security prison. One woman, Katelyn Hodges, a 28-year-old functioning at the level of an 8-year-old, according to her mother, has been through the county jail, the state prison, the SWITC, and community housing, but her mental illnesses have not been effectively treated at any of the facilities. Her brother said that Katelyn has tried to take her life five times. Every human deserves, regardless of disability, to live a meaningful life, and we just want her to do well, he said. Nobody deserves to feel like the world would be better without them because theyre positioned to fail.

[According](#) to the *Canadian Press*, the British Columbia (B.C.) Court of Appeal upheld a previous decision, ruling unanimously that prolonged solitary confinement in federal prisons violates the constitution. Justice Gregory Fitch wrote in the decision, The draconian impact of the law on segregated inmates is so grossly disproportionate to the objectives of the provision that it offends the fundamental norms of a free and democratic society. The B.C. Parliament also passed a law last week, restricting the use of segregation, but the B.C. Civil Liberties Association says that the bill still allows for unconstitutional placement of people in solitary confinement. Regarding the court decision, the associations litigation director Grace Pastine said, This decision calls out Canadas long-standing practice of isolating prisoners for weeks, months and even years at a time with no end in sight, a practice that has been condemned around the world as a form of torture.

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

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.

I was in solitaire one time for over 15 months. Many other times I was thrown in for little of nothing month on in . supposed investigations.

horrible conditions , abuse ..having to watch guards abuse other inmates (even crippled and mentally challenged ones) Freezing cold temperatures very little clothes or blankets

Hardly any care..

couldnt even get pads Hardley without begging..

God that list goes on. Watching people die left and right not just in solitaire but in prison itself. A lot of them from abuse and medical neglect

All the while Washington DC politicians judicial Supremes Etc cry we need correction for these bad people.

Give me a break.

And unfortunately all these groups are political because when they were contacted about my brother, they all refused to see it as a humanitarian case after 10 yrs in solitary confinement, because of the violent nature of his crime against the government! They only help those when it benefits them in some way.. my brother died from lack of medical care, over ten yrs in solitary, and abuse by guards all documented, yet no one would help!

Your all a sham!

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