

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/08/04/federal-judge-extended-solitary-confinement-causes-lasting-psychological-damage-and-emotional-harm/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | August 4, 2010

In a follow-up to a recent ruling by a federal judge that prisoners at Tamms State Supermax in Illinois do not receive due process, the [Belleville News-Democrat](#) reports on some significant features of the judge's written decision. As George Pawlaczyk and Beth Hundsforfer write, the judge's statement supports researchers' findings that extended solitary confinement not only exacerbates mental illness, but causes it.

Based on testimony about conditions at the Tamms Correctional Center, where many inmates have been kept in solitary confinement for a decade or more, a federal judge has ruled that such isolation leads to mental illness.

In a statement in support of his decision in a due process prisoners lawsuit, U.S. District Court Judge G. Patrick Murphy wrote, Tamms imposes dramatic limitations on human contact, so much so as to inflict lasting psychological damage and emotional harm on inmates confined there for long periods.

Murphy's 94-page decision made public Tuesday was praised by prison reformers. It was derived from testimony from prison officials and inmates who described crushing monotony of spending 23 hours per day alone in a cell, devoid of human contact. Murphy wrote that prisoners are not told why they were sent to what he has ruled is Illinois' toughest lockup or when or how they can get out. The judge's finding concerning psychological harm contradicts prison officials' numerous claims over the years since the supermax opened in 1998, that long-term solitary confinement does not lead to mental breakdown.

The *Belleville News-Democrat* also [offers links](#) to the judge's ruling and findings, a video tour of Tamms, and previous investigative articles on abuses at the supermax.



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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Well here is an ex-judge that agrees with him.

<http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/metropolitan/7137956.html>

Ex-judge says prison unfair, cruel to him
Kent alleges inhumane treatment and asks his sentence be shortened
By LISE OLSEN
HOUSTON CHRONICLE
Aug. 3, 2010, 10:18PM

As a prisoner, former U.S. District Judge Samuel B. Kent has been shunted into solitary confinement, forced to hear the screams of another inmate being raped and ordered by a cruel sergeant in the Florida prison system to do calisthenics in the nude, according to allegations in a federal court memorandum filed Tuesday.

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