

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Annalena Wolcke](#) | July 6, 2021

A [survey conducted by the Program for Public Consultation](#) at the University of Maryland found that five in six voters favor sharply restricting the use of solitary confinement. The survey found that the majority of American voters support reforms that would limit the use of solitary, including 84% of Republican and 90% of Democrat voters. In a press release, the [Unlock the Box campaign urged](#) the Biden Administration to begin implementing the [blueprint for ending solitary confinement](#) that was created by the Federal Anti-Solitary Task Force (FAST) and is supported by more than 150 organizations.

In June, the PROTECT ACT was passed with bi-partisan support in both houses of the Connecticut state legislature. The bill would have sharply limited the use of solitary confinement in the state. But last Wednesday, Governor Ned Lamont, a Democrat, unexpectedly vetoed the bill, claiming that it would put the safety of incarcerated persons and corrections employees at substantial risk, [reports the Connecticut Examiner](#). In a statement, the [Stop Solitary CT campaign condemned](#) the governors decision, saying that Lamont defied the democratic will of the people and disregarded the humanity of the incarcerated people in his custody. Campaign members [demonstrated outside a prison](#) on Friday, urging lawmakers to override the veto.

The Massachusetts Department of Corrections (MDOC) announced plans to end most uses of solitary confinement in state prisons over the next three years. [According to WBUR](#) public radio, MDOC says it will address disruptive behavior by focusing on the needs of those in its custody instead of placing them in solitary. The decision comes after an [independent report](#) by Falcon Correctional and Community Services recommended eliminating the use of restrictive housing. In a press statement, [Prisoners Legal Services of Massachusetts \(PLSMA\) welcomed the news](#). Its been a disgrace for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to still have a practice like this and were very happy to see that theres a plan to close it, said Liz Matos, executive director of PLSMA, in an interview with WBUR. The organization also expressed a number of implementation concerns based on past experiences with the MDOC, including the fact that newly created units must not continue the status quo under a new name.

In a [commentary in the Gotham Gazette](#), activists Akeem Browder and Melania Brown urge the New York City Council to finally end the use of solitary confinement in NYC jails. Each lost a sibling to solitary confinement. Brown's brother Kalief spent three years on Rikers Island, two of them in solitary, beginning when he was 16, before the charges against him were dismissed, and he committed suicide following his release. Brown's sister Layleen Polanco was held in solitary confinement because of who she was as a transgender woman, and died in her cell of a known seizure disorder. While NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio promised to end solitary, Browder and Brown argue that the city's actual plans are smoke and mirrors and will continue solitary and just call it by another name. They urge the City Council to keep a promise that the mayor did not.

Longtime civil rights activist and former presidential candidate the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson Sr., who co-heads the organization Rainbow PUSH, met last week with Anthony Gay, who spent 22 years in solitary confinement in Illinois, [reports the Chicago Crusader](#). During their meeting, Jackson expressed his support for a bill named after Gay that would severely curtail the use of solitary in the state.

[An article in The Appeal](#) points out that for most of the approximately 630,000 people locked up in local jails across the country, authority over the use or elimination of solitary confinement falls to the sheriff. Advocates are using this fact to press local sheriffs to take action to end torturous conditions in their jails, even in the absence of federal or state law limiting solitary. The Southern Center for Human Rights and the Georgia Advocacy Office recently filed a lawsuit on behalf of women with mental health issues who were held in solitary at Georgias South Fulton Municipal Regional Jail. The women allege that the sheriffs office and its representatives in the jail are harming the mental health of these women by placing them in isolation, reports *The Appeal*.

Many prisons responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by instituting lockdowns. As a consequence, incarcerated people were unable to complete rehabilitative programming that they needed to secure their release, and were instead forced to stay in prison for longer while the virus raged inside prison walls. Lorenzo Culbero, for example, was denied parole because he didnt complete a substance use program that was shut down during the pandemic. I found it completely unfair that [the parole board] would consider my failure to complete a program that they themselves had closed because of the pandemic, Culbero told [The Appeal](#).

A [new infographic](#) produced by Solitary Watch and the Unlock the Box campaign shows progress made in states across the country in introducing and passing legislation to limit solitary confinement, as well as the work that still remains to be done.

Annalena Wolke Anna interned with Solitary Watch before beginning a masters degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Oxford, where her research focuses on ethnicity in German prisons.

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 feel that issues like this needs more publicity, and DeBlassio and Cuomo need to be put on the spot and asked why are these draconian practices still continued, instead of initiatives like schooling and proper training for when individuals are released. The public needs more information regarding tax dollars being squandered in the prison and jail systems.

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