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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | August 12, 2018

Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) issued a [press release](#) reporting the conditions at Stillwater Prison in Minnesota, where incarcerated men have been locked down, effectively in solitary confinement, for the past 27 days. A recorded [conversation](#) with a man held at Stillwater described the conditions of the lockdown as a humanitarian crisis, including confinement for 20 days straight without leaving their cells, without proper health care, and without the ability to wash their clothes. Another individual held at Stillwater reported, The stench in the units from the garbage is gagging. While the Minnesota Department of Corrections has claimed to be transitioning off of lockdown, an end date has not been announced.

North Carolina revealed a new state prison policy this week, standardizing the use of solitary confinement and the deprivation of visitation privileges for individuals who are alleged to attack prison staff. *The Charlotte Observer* [described](#) the increased violence at North Carolina correctional institutions this year, and pointed to severe staffing shortages as a contributing factor, leaving prison officers vastly outnumbered.

[As reported](#) by WABE, Georgia-based human rights groups Project South and Georgia Detention Watch released a [report](#) this week, exposing the denial of adequate medical care, the lack of mental health care, and the use of solitary confinement at the Atlanta City Detention Center, which, as of last month, houses 98 detained immigrants. A Georgia Detention Watch employee said, They were put in solitary confinement for simply indicating that they had and were suffering from mental illness. Project South has called on the mayor of Atlanta Keisha Lance Bottoms to shut down the Atlanta City Detention Center and to cease collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in detaining immigrants.

Shadowproof [reported](#) that thousands of immigrants held at Northwest Detention Center (NWDC), an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility run by private prison company GEO Group in Tacoma, Washington, have been certified as a class in their lawsuit against the forced labor program at the facility. While GEO Group claimed they could not hire the immigrants as employees and pay them minimum wage based on their lack [of] work authorization, a federal judge ruled that paying \$1 per day for the immigrants work was an illegal employment relationship. In February 2018, immigrants detained at NWDC engaged in a hunger strike and work stoppage, protesting GEO Groups inadequate food and the use of solitary confinement as retaliation.

A correctional health care expert released a report which found that individuals with serious mental illnesses at Broward County Jail in Florida have been malnourished, denied medication, and placed in solitary confinement at the facility, often due to lack of staff. The report included the deaths of three mentally ill individuals at the facility, one of whom was sent to solitary confinement after allegedly refusing mental health treatment. He lost 30 pounds within the month and a half before he died. *South Florida Sun Sentinel* [reported](#) the private Armor Correctional Health Services, which has operated Broward's health care since 2004, will be replaced by another company, Correct Care Solutions, next month. The report was produced as part of the federal oversight of Broward County Jail. A settlement has been reached with the county for a continuation of the federal oversight as well as improvements to mental health care at the facility.

The family of Vincent Gaines filed a lawsuit this week, claiming that the private health care provider Corizon could have prevented Gaines' death during his five-year sentence in the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC). While the lawsuit claims that FDOC and Corizon were both aware of his mental illnesses, Gaines was denied care and placed in solitary confinement, or close management, at Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, Florida. [According](#) to *Palm Beach Post*, three months after his placement in solitary, Gaines died of starvation, having lost 75 pounds in two and a half years. Gaines' family said, Vincent's death is yet another tragic tale of a large corporation valuing its profits more than human life. No one deserves to die like Vincent did starving and alone. Corizon has since backed out of its contract with the FDOC after several lawsuits alleging wrongful deaths and misdiagnoses.

[According](#) to *USA Today*, a class-action lawsuit claims that the private prison company CoreCivic failed to provide 60 diabetic individuals held at Trousdale Turner Correctional Center in Tennessee with their insulin during a three-week lockdown two years ago. The lawsuit says the frequent lockdowns, a result of understaffing and a byproduct of CoreCivic's profit-driven structure, force prisoners to endure solitary confinement and often pause or delay medical care, including the distribution of meals and insulin. A separate lawsuit filed this year claims that a man died at Trousdale, after being left screaming in pain in his cell with alarmingly high blood sugar. The

American Diabetes Association has filed a motion to join the class-action lawsuit in a call for higher health care standards at all CoreCivic facilities.

The Guardian [reported](#) on a plan, led by Puerto Ricos Secretary of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Erik Roln, to transfer 3,200 individuals currently held at Puerto Ricos Bayamn Correctional Complex to La Palma Correctional Center in Arizona, operated by private prison company CoreCivic. While Roln claims the transfer is cost-effective and necessary for their economy, several incarcerated individuals expressed strong opposition to the transfers, saying that they dont want to be moved away from their families. The article also points out the substandard conditions at La Palma, including the overuse of solitary confinement and a range of basic security and safety flaws.

The Crime Report published an [account](#) from Jeremiah Bourgeois, a man serving a life sentence in Washington State since the age of 14, who spent six years in solitary confinement. Bourgeois mentions the psychological effects he continues to experience from his time in solitary and discusses the lack of access to clean, complete books and the torturous cacophony of misery and madness, especially noticeable without a book to distract him.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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