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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](#) | January 6, 2020

The Hill published an [opinion piece](#) by Mark Levin, the Vice President of Criminal Justice Policy for the Right on Crime Initiative, recapping progress from prison administrators and legislators in the last few years that has restricted the use of solitary confinement. Levin cites Colorado as an example of success, after the state reduced the number of people held in solitary from 1,500 in 2011 to 185 in 2016, and abolished solitary for longer than fifteen days in 2017. Between 2011 and 2016, the average number of assaults on staff dropped from 262 to 160 across the states prison system. A strategy in Maine required that supervisors approve stays in solitary longer than three days, instead of leaving it to the discretion of a captain. Levin concluded, During this season, we can celebrate the progress in these states, but also build resolve for more reforms in 2020.

The *Fresno Bee* [reported](#) that the Fresno County Jail in California has been slowly implementing changes in their approach to solitary confinement, after settling a lawsuit with the Prison Law Office in 2015. In addition to a plan to close a section of the jail devoted to solitary confinement, the jail has begun a tablet program specifically for people held in isolation, which provides incentives for incarcerated people to complete educational lessons by earning points for music, movies, or games. Fresno County Assistant Sheriff Tom Gattie said he hopes the tablets will help minimize the damaging effects of sensory deprivation. Gattie says, The goal is to house inmates in the least restrictive housing possible, but he still argues for the need to isolate certain people.

According to Fox17, Tennessee Representative Jesse Chism introduced bills [HB 1185](#) and [HB 1184](#) that would restrict the use of solitary confinement on children and pregnant women. Chism filed the bills last year but the Senate Judiciary Committee will consider the bills in the upcoming legislative session. Chism called solitary confinement a barbaric practice that is not only ineffective as it increases recidivism rates among prisoners, it also cost taxpayers more than storing them in the general population.

The *Buffalo News* published an [op-ed](#) by Nicole Capozziello, a social work doctoral student and organizer with the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement. Capozziello called on the reader to imagine living between four cement walls for days, weeks, years on end. Not seeing the sun. Not seeing your face in a mirror. Not exchanging a smile with another person. Not having a conversation. Even beyond the damage imposed on the people held in solitary, Capozziello argues it dehumanizes everyone involved: the prisoners subjected to it, the corrections officers who must enforce it, and the citizens and policymakers who permit it. The article calls for the passage of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, which would ban solitary for longer than fifteen days in New Yorks prisons and jails.

The BBC published a [video](#) featuring Photo Requests from Solitary, which invites people in solitary confinement to request any imagereal or imaginedand finds volunteer photographers on the outside to fulfill the request. Laurie Jo Reynolds, the founder of the project, recalled one person requesting, any scene focusing on the beauty of autumn leaves, which as you know, we do not have access to in the concrete box that is deemed as yard here. To learn more about the project, which is currently sponsored by Solitary Watch, or to view or fill requests, visit: photorequestsfromsolitary.org.

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

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