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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 [Aviva Stahl](#) | April 2, 2017

Prison officers at the Tecumseh State Prison in Nebraska are concerned that the soft treatment of people on the inside, including a reduction in the use of solitary confinement, is putting the safety of guards at risk. Were rewarding bad behavior. You're seeing it every day in the news, one officer told [the Omaha World-Herald](#). If an inmate wants to attack us, they're going to.

The wife of Orlando nightclub shooter Omar Mateen is being held in solitary confinement as she awaits extradition from California to Florida, [the Daily Mail](#) has reported. Her lawyer told the outlet that she is allowed out for just one hour a day, has a window with a view of the parking lot and is fed a basic diet consisting of regular meals of chicken and rice delivered three times a day through a slot in her cell door.

A 58-year-old man being held on death row in Idaho was found dead in his cell, apparently of natural causes. A [local outlet](#) reporting on the incident noted, [Idaho] Death row inmates are kept in solitary confinement. They remain inside their 12-foot by seven-foot cells for 23 hours a day, and they can spend one hour outside in a similarly sized cage. They are escorted out of their cells for showers, medical appointments and meetings with attorneys.

Solitary survivor and organizer Johnny Perez penned an op-ed for [USA Today](#) about the importance of investing in education instead of incarceration. His first experience in solitary was at the age of 16. Soon I started talking, out loud, to myself, he explains. I wasn't doing that because I was crazy or because I deserved to be in solitary. I needed to hear a voice. I needed to feel and be human. My self-talk was full of self-doubt. Prison culture, for a person who is that young, is not just punishment but a vehicle that limits what a child thinks he can become.

A group of people held on death row at Louisiana's Angola Prison [have filed a federal class action lawsuit](#) against prison officials, claiming the conditions of isolation violate their constitutional rights. Physical human contact of any kind is completely prohibited, the suit says. The harsh repercussions of prolonged isolation are well-known among mental health experts, physicians and human rights experts in the United States and around the world.

The Connecticut House judiciary committee held a hearing on Bill 7203, which if passed would create greater transparency around the use of solitary confinement, and also put in place new training and safety procedures for prison guards. According to the [Hartford Courant](#), a lobbyist for Connecticut's correctional officers, Brian Anderson, submitted written testimony expressing concern about the bill. Administrative segregation provides a safe place to house inmates who are a threat to other inmates or staff, he said.

[Amnesty International](#) has asked a federal judge for permission to visit Mexican drug lord Joaquin El Chapo Guzmán in his jail cell in Manhattan to evaluate the conditions in which he is being held, [reported UPI](#). Guzmán is being held in 23-hour isolation at the Metropolitan Correctional Center.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. She's written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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.

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