

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/02/05/federal-bureau-of-prisons-to-undergo-review-of-solitary-confinement-practices/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 5, 2013

On Monday, the office of Illinois Senator Dick Durbin put out the following press release, announcing that the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) had agreed to submit to a review of its solitary confinement practices.

In 2010, a spokesperson for the BOP [said](#) that federal prisons held approximately 11,150 prisoners in some form of segregated special housing. This figure includes the 400 men held in ultra-isolation at the U.S. Penitentiary Administrative Maximum (ADX) in Florence, Colorado, which is currently the target of federal [lawsuits](#) claiming conditions there lead to mental illness and suicide, and violate the Constitution.

The planned review follows on the first-ever [Congressional hearing](#) on solitary confinement, held last June by a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee chaired by Durbin. It is described as a comprehensive and independent assessment, though it will be carried out by the National Institute of Corrections, which is an agency of the BOP.

Solitary Watch will report further on this story in the coming days, including the BOP's assertion that it has already reduced its segregated population by nearly 25 percent.

DURBIN STATEMENT ON FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS ASSESSMENT OF ITS SOLITARY CONFINEMENT PRACTICES

[WASHINGTON, D.C.] Assistant Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) released the following statement today announcing that the Federal Bureau of Prisons has agreed to a comprehensive and independent assessment of its use of solitary confinement in the nation's federal prisons. This first-ever review of federal segregation policies comes after Durbin chaired a hearing last year on the human rights, fiscal and public safety consequences of solitary confinement. Last week, Durbin and Bureau of Prisons Director Charles Samuels discussed the assessment, which will be conducted through the National Institute of Corrections.

The announcement by the Bureau of Prisons that it will conduct its first-ever review of its use of solitary confinement is an important development, Durbin said. The United States holds more prisoners in solitary confinement than any other democratic nation in the world and the dramatic expansion of solitary confinement is a human rights issue we can't ignore. I am confident the Bureau of Prisons will permit a thorough and independent review and look forward to seeing the results when they are made public. We can no longer slam the cell door and turn our backs on the impact our policies have on the mental state of the incarcerated and ultimately on the safety of our nation.

In his hearing last year, Durbin emphasized the importance of reforming the way we treat the incarcerated and the use of solitary confinement in prisons and detention centers around the country. Following that hearing, Durbin has twice met with Bureau of Prisons Director Samuels to push for additional reforms and encourage a sufficiently robust assessment of the Bureau's segregation practices.

Since Durbin's hearing, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has reportedly reduced its segregated population by nearly 25 percent. In addition, it has closed two of its Special Management Units, a form of segregated housing, due to the reduction in the segregated population.

The National Institute of Corrections, through which the assessment will be conducted, assisted states like Mississippi and Colorado in reforming their solitary practices. After assessing its practices, Mississippi reduced its segregated population by more than 75 percent, which resulted in a 50 percent reduction in prison violence.

During the last several decades, the United States has witnessed an explosion in the use of solitary confinement for federal, state, and local prisoners and detainees. Today, more than 2.3 million people are imprisoned in the United States. This is by far the highest per capita rate of incarceration in the world.

Solitary confinement also called supermax housing, segregation and isolation is designed to separate inmates from each other and isolate them for a variety of reasons. Originally used to segregate the most violent prisoners in the nation's supermax prisons, the practice is being used more frequently, including for the supposed protection of vulnerable groups like immigrants, children and LGBT inmates. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the United States holds over 80,000 people in some kind of restricted housing. In Illinois,

56% of inmates have spent some time in segregated housing.

Prisoners in isolation are often confined to small cells without windows, with little to no access to the outside world or adequate programs and treatment. Inmates are confined to these cells for up to 23 hours a day. Such extreme isolation can have serious psychological effects on inmates and can lead to mental illness, self-mutilation and suicide. According to several state and national studies, at least half of all prison suicides occur in solitary confinement.

In addition to the impact solitary confinement has on inmates, there are also public safety and fiscal concerns with the practice. The bipartisan Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons found that the use of solitary confinement often increased acts of violence in prisons. Further, it is extremely costly to house a prisoner in solitary confinement. In Joliet, Illinois only supermax prison, it cost more than \$60,000 a year to house a prisoner in solitary confinement while it was operational, compared to an average of \$22,000 for inmates in other prisons.

Video from Durbin's June hearing on solitary confinement can be found at www.judiciary.senate.gov.

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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Seriously, how can we as Americans, incarcerate so many more of our people than any other country in the world? Does our society produce so many more bad people than anyone else or is our justice system on steroids? Given the new scandals being uncovered daily about the IRS and this government, I would say we ALL know who the real criminals are. They just happen to be holding the guns. At least for the moment, it would seem. Can we entrust the execution of justice to those kinds of people? Absolutely not. They do not want justice. They simply want just-us. 2 Chron. 7:14

My husband, a father to all nine of our children, and convicted of tax crimes, was in the hole (solitary confinement) for THREE MONTHS in the summer of 2012 in FCI Manchester because he got emotional while asking to be moved closer to his young family. It was a 10 1/2 hr. drive over curvy Kentucky roads. Our children ranged in age from 1-17 at the time.

Solitary confinement in the form of Administrative Detention is a disciplinary method although forbidden by policy and the constitution. Please do not get me started on timely reviews when it often took 6 months to get out of Admin Seg even if you were cleared of the incident.

you gotta be mentally tough to handle isolation. Most people are not qualified. Period.

Prisons are a money maker. Jobs, politics, profit, elections. Do the math.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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