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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](#) | November 19, 2017

Saifullah Paracha, a 70-year-old man from Pakistan and the oldest individual incarcerated at Guantnamo Bay, says that the treatment of detainees at the facility has gotten worse since the election of Donald Trump. Last month, as [reported](#) by *Newsweek*, guards performed a forced cell extraction on Paracha before subjecting him to solitary confinement for three days despite his multiple medical conditions and two past heart attacks. These actions took place after Paracha wrote a letter to the commander of the facility about the abuse of individuals currently on hunger strike, whose health, he says, has deteriorated to a medically dangerous level. Paracha has been held at Guantnamo for 13 years without a trial, and says the treatment of detainees today is like when we were brought to Gitmo. Not since the beginning days of Guantanamo has it been like this. Its a hell.

The Austin Chronicle [reported](#) that a woman detained at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center in Taylor, Texas, operated by private prison company CoreCivic, was threatened with solitary confinement after revealing that a prison guard was sexually assaulting her. Laura Monterrosa, who claims many of the women at the detention center have faced similar situations of sexual abuse but fear the consequences of speaking out, is seeking asylum from El Salvador, where she was raped by her uncle and forced into prostitution.

The Arizona Department of Corrections has made changes to the living conditions of 88 out of the 120 individuals it holds on death row. While death row in Arizona previously meant automatic subjection to solitary confinement, prison officials have determined that this approach puts their staff at greater risk. Director of Offender Operations Carson McWilliams [explained](#) to *Fox 10 Phoenix*, The Correction Department is not here to punish people. Its here to, first of all provide a safe environment for everyone, inmates and staff. And that second thing is the more opportunity we get to let people out of their cells to do activities, it helps them mentally, it helps them to be more pro social. It lessens the violence.

Emily Butler, a 29-year-old woman serving time in solitary confinement at Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup, apparently committed suicide in her cell last weekend. *The Baltimore Sun* [reported](#) that four suicides took place in the Maryland prison system in 2016, all of them in solitary confinement. According to the Maryland Prisoners Rights Coalition, the state employs solitary confinement at about twice the national average.

In a settlement deal with the American Civil Liberties Union, [reported](#) by the Associated Press, Grays Harbor County in Washington state agreed to change its practice of placing children in solitary confinement without constant review and without standard amenities. The lawsuit claimed that a 17-year-old boy was held in solitary confinement at Grays Harbor County Juvenile Detention Facility more than 40 times, amounting to cruel and unusual punishment and violating his rights to due process. Most of the boy's stays in isolation were for minor offenses, such as passing notes, spilling water, and cursing, the ACLU said. During one 8-day stretch, he was locked in a padded cell that was spattered with food and blood, with a feces-covered grate over a hole in the ground that had been used as a toilet, and was given only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and water.

Pittsburgh's public radio station 90.5 WESA [reported](#) that the American Civil Liberties Union settled a lawsuit against Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, for placing pregnant women in solitary confinement for minor infractions, arguing this practice constituted cruel and unusual punishment. The county agreed to pay \$90,000 in legal fees and reparation to be split among the five women included in the suit, in addition to implementing a new, comprehensive policy that prevents pregnant women from being placed in solitary, unless they pose a serious and immediate risk of physical harm, and requires adequate nutrition for pregnant and post-partum women.

In light of recent revelations of violence at Wisconsin's Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake juvenile detention facilities, *Corrections One* published [a commentary](#) by DeShane Reed, superintendent of Indiana's Marion Superior Courts Juvenile Detention Center, arguing against solitary confinement as a solution to violent or disobedient behaviors. Based on his 22 years of experience working in the juvenile justice system and mental health services, Reed revealed a list of alternatives to solitary that he says have worked in the Indiana juvenile justice system and could work in Wisconsin as well, such as completion of written assignments related to the behavior, mediation with staff or peers, individualized success plans, and a mentor appointed to the youth.

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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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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