

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | November 12, 2017

One of the Angola 3, Albert Woodfox, who served the longest stretch in solitary confinement documented in the United States of 43 years and 10 months, [discussed](#) on *Love + Radio* his experience as a Black man in society, in the Louisiana prison system, and in solitary: The thing about pain is it's always fresh. No matter how long between the time you experience the pain and every time you talk about it. Woodfox recalled the history leading up to his four decades in isolation, his resistance against abuse and racism within the prison system, his experience of grieving while in solitary, and his ultimate release.

The *NY Daily News* [reported](#) that the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) has paid out \$7 million in the past two and a half years to settle 127 lawsuits brought by incarcerated individuals or prison staff. In one settlement, DOCCS agreed to pay \$800,000 to Richard Pattiasina, who claimed in a federal lawsuit that a prison officer at Elmira Correctional Facility physically assaulted him to the point of breaking his testicle, after which he was placed in solitary confinement without medical assistance for seven days. The \$7 million payout includes more than \$1 million to the New York Civil Liberties Union to settle a class action lawsuit that resulted in the agreement to incrementally reduce the use of solitary confinement.

Alameda County Supervisors met with representatives from the County Sheriff's Office to address the grievances of incarcerated individuals who held a five-day hunger strike last month at Glenn E. Dyer Detention Facility in Oakland. Their demands include an end to solitary confinement. While Sheriff's Captain Dave Blanchard claimed that individuals are not held in indefinite solitary confinement at the Glenn Dyer facility, the *East Bay Times* [reported](#) that, in response to a question regarding the length of stays in isolation at the facility, Blanchard answered, It could be a week, three weeks, three months or three years. He later said he misspoke.

*Common Dreams* [published](#) a letter from Ifoma Modibo Kambon to author Cynthia Kaufman, reflecting on his 38 years in solitary confinement in California's Security Housing Units (SHUs). Kambon describes the conditions and psychological effects of prolonged solitary that he himself felt himself and that he observed in other incarcerated people.

*Voice of San Diego* [reported](#) the Citizens Law Enforcement Review Board (CLERB) in San Diego is recommending the dismissal of 22 investigations into deaths of individuals in the custody of the county or in county detention facilities. The board claims that a section of the California Public Safety Officers Bill of Rights prevents punitive action against officers if the investigation doesn't meet a one year deadline. Others dispute this interpretation and argue that the dismissals allow officers to operate with impunity and will lead to more deaths in the future. Under investigation were cases resulting in serious lawsuits against the county for officer misconduct or negligent mental health care in the detention facilities, including the suicide of a father of three who had been diagnosed with a serious mental illness, one day after he was placed in solitary confinement. Former San Jose police auditor Barbara Attard commented, To just wholesale close cases, I've never seen an agency do that.

*The Marshall Project*, in collaboration with *VICE*, [published](#) the writing of Dwayne Hurd, who is serving a sentence of 32 years to life for second degree murder. Hurd described the experience of mourning his grandfather's death, among those of several other members of his family, in his solitary confinement cell at the maximum security Great Meadows Correctional Facility in upstate New York.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) [reports](#) that in response to pleas for protection from discrimination, transgender woman Jules Williams received further harassment from prison guards at the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh, who called her faggot and freak show. Williams says she was forced to shower in front of incarcerated men and was placed in an isolation cell, where she was repeatedly raped by her male cellmate. Despite the mandate of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) to assign transgender individuals to the male or female housing based on serious consideration of where they would be safest, the ACLU claims that many jails and prisons around the country have failed to fulfill this mandate, subjecting transgender individuals to abuse and assault.

*Teen Vogue* [reported](#) the story of Jaki Murillo, who was first arrested when she was 9 years old for threatening a teacher, eventually ending up in Los Angeles juvenile detention hall at 12, where she was placed in solitary confinement because she was under 14. While she was allegedly isolated for her own protection, Murillo said that more than a year in solitary had left lasting effects on her personality and psyche. California Congress Member Tony Crdenas has introduced the Protecting Youth from Solitary Confinement Act (H.R.

1926) in an attempt to solidify a federal ban on youth solitary put in place by President Obama, and worries about the ultimate fate of the resolution in the hands of Donald Trump. We need to stop being the only [member country of the United Nations] that does solitary for minors, Crdenas said. Obamas directive is limited to federal prisons, and would not affect state prisons and local jails like the one where Jaki Murillo was held in isolation.

According to [TXK Today](#), Billy Joel Tracy, a man imprisoned in Texas for assault and burglary, now faces a potential death sentence for the killing a correctional officer at the Barry Telford Unit in New Boston, Texas. His defense introduced testimony from neuroradiologist Travis Snyder that Tracy possesses abnormalities in the part of his brain that controls emotions and inhibitions, as well as testimony from forensic psychologist Mark Cunningham that solitary confinement, which Tracy has been subjected to since 2005, causes individuals mental and emotional suffering, and leads them to develop a trench warfare attitude and to become a savage or sink into despair.

Valerie Kiebal 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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