

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Aviva Stahl](#) | May 14, 2017

The family of a man who committed suicide while in solitary confinement is [suing the state of Montana](#), alleging that the state prison failed to adequately address his mental health issues. Matthew Brandemihl, 32, died in September 2014 after being arrested for violating his probation; he had previously attempted suicide on the inside and had expressed paranoid thoughts to prison staff.

Human Rights Watch, along with the nonprofit group Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement, [released a report](#) in which they asked medical experts to review 18 deaths in immigrant detention facilities and found that alleged medical neglect contribute to the deaths of seven detainees. According to [the Marshall Project](#), the report details the suicide of another woman who was repeatedly held in solitary confinement without mental health treatment. The medical staff kept doing the same thing, expecting a different outcome. That she finally killed herself should not have come as a surprise, wrote one of the doctors reviewing ICEs records.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals issued a [mixed ruling](#) on a case involving solitary confinement, that of Indiana man Aaron Isby, who challenged his long-term placement in isolation. As [the Indiana Lawyer](#) notes, while the Court reversed summary judgment against a federal inmate on his constitutional due process claims, it also found that the reviews of his prolonged stay in solitary confinement may not pass constitutional muster that extended isolation did not constitute an Eighth Amendment violation. The case was remanded to the District Court to address the Fourteenth Amendment claims.

New York Corrections Commissioner Joseph Ponte stepped down from his post after a series of scandals, including allegations that he used city vehicles to make personal trips. In an interview with [the New York Times](#), Ponte cited what he said were the significant achievements of his tenure, including the end of solitary confinement at Rikers for all people under 22, as well as all women. Advocates have disputed Pontes claims, maintaining that isolation is still occurring for these populations, simply under a different name.

A man who spent a decade on the inside, including two years in solitary, graduated magna cum laude from a vocational program in Boston and gave the commencement address. I lived in a neighborhood where hope didnt exist, where potential didnt matter, Kyle L. Gathers told fellow graduates at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology. And when you heard you had it, it saddened you, because you couldnt fathom a future.

An alleged terrorist who cooperated with the government was finally sentenced after serving more than eight years in jail, most of it in solitary confinement. According to [the Daily Beast](#), defense attorney Steven Zissou said his client, Bryant Vinas spent almost ten years in a secure facility, in near-constant solitary confinement, and was promised the case would be over next year, next year by prosecutors. Vinas received an additional 90 days, after both prosecutors and defense attorneys agreed that his cooperation warranted far lighter sentence than what federal guidelines recommend.

Texas Tilton Carter received a second stay of execution this year, after his lawyers [filed a motion](#) arguing that new evidence conflicts with evidence that was presented at trial. As the [Austin Chronicle reported](#) in regards to Carters case, men held on Texas Death Row spend 22-24 hours per day in solitary confinement. And even outside, the so-called yard is a slightly larger cell closed off by high concrete walls and caging over the top, which limits natural light. Its typical for death row inmates to spend more than a decade living in these conditions prior to their execution.

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

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by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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