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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](#) | July 29, 2018

Sixty-one-year-old Eldon Lee Jackson died at Harris County Jail in Texas this week, one day after being placed in solitary confinement. The *Houston Chronicle* [reported](#) that Jackson, who had a history of threatening suicide, was found unconscious in his cell with a noose around his neck.

The Carrizales-Rucker Detention Center in Cameron County, Texas, has announced it is in the process of upgrading its video camera system with 142 new IP [Internet Protocol] cameras with 60 days of storage, continuous recording 24/7, [according](#) to *Brownsville Herald*. The Commissioners Court chief legal counsel claims the upgrades are unrelated to a \$1 million settlement from the death of Fernando Longoria, who had been serving a 10-day sentence when he began to experience seizures. The lawsuit stated that jail staff, instead of calling for medical attention, placed Longoria in a padded solitary confinement cell, where the camera stopped working eight hours before his death in January of 2015. A chief attorney for the county said that improvements are being made without admitting we've done anything wrong in the past.

At a forum in Maryland hosted by Frederick Friends Meeting, prisoners rights advocates and local organizations gathered to discuss the use of solitary confinement in the states correctional facilities. A speaker from Disability Rights Maryland, who has been researching for a report on the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, described the solitary confinement units that often house people with mental illness. In segregation, the conditions are particularly awful. There are cells with broken glass because the windows are broken. We've seen cells with no mattress, just a bed frame. Cells with no working water. [According](#) to *Frederick News-Post*, the former deputy secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services also attended the forum and suggested basing reforms on incarcerated people's experiences. He said, If you want to know how the prison should be run, you should probably ask the people being housed in the prison.

The Guardian published an [article](#) authored by Isaac Bailey recalling the experience of his brother, Herbert Moochie Bailey Jr., who spent years in solitary confinement for refusing to cut his dreadlocks. The South Carolina Department of Corrections, allegedly for security reasons, prohibited hair that was not closely cut, though dreadlocks hold religious significance for many Rastafarians, including Moochie. Bailey wrote about visiting his brother in prison, watching him rock back and forth the entire time like a madman, communicating by furiously writing on small scraps of paper he had folded and refolded dozens of times. Moochie eventually agreed to cut his hair and was released from prison in 2014, but his brother says that he still suffers the psychological effects of isolation and goes in and out of that craziness.

New York Post [reported](#) that the president of Correction Officers Benevolent Association blamed the reduction in the use of solitary confinement for the hike in workers compensation claims filed by corrections officers at Rikers Island in New York in the past couple of years. A spokesman for the New York City Department of Correction, however, said that the increase in workers comp claims demonstrates the increase in staff. He said, The increase in claims and payments reflects higher staffing levels, higher wages and our strengthened emphasis on timely and proper claim reporting.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, who has announced his retirement from his position on the Supreme Court, spoke at a judicial conference in Anaheim, California, where he defended the rule of law as a necessary moral constant in democracies, no matter what politician sits at the head of state. [According](#) to *Courthouse News Service*, Kennedy spoke out in favor of criminal justice reform and against solitary confinement. Penal reform is very high on my list of things to do. Solitary confinement is wrong. Prison sentences in this country are eight times longer than comparable countries in western Europe. We need to always be thinking about ways we can improve the rule of law.

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.

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