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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | August 7, 2021

Although the Virginia Department of Corrections claims to be shifting their solitary confinement practice to restorative housing, the Virginia Coalition on Solitary Confinement and ACLU of Virginia maintain that many people are still held in isolation for 20 hours a day, [the Progress-Index reports](#). Coalition organizer Natasha White said, [VDOC] can claim theyve ended solitary confinement when so many from such a variety of prisons claim to be kept in solitary confinement conditions. At a press conference on July 28, the coalition and ACLU demanded anti-solitary legislation and an independent investigation into the VDOC.

The Abolitionist Law Center released surveillance footage of an Allegheny County Jail officer tasing incarcerated woman Kim Andrews multiple times in an elevator, surrounded by at least seven other officers, [the Pittsburgh City Paper reports](#). Andrews has been diagnosed with multiple psychiatric disorders, and attempted suicide at the jail six times before and after the tasing incident. The footage, from May 2020, was obtained as the result of a petition to remove Andrews from solitary confinement, where she spent nearly half a year. Andrews said, There is a prevailing culture inside the jail that the people who watch over you can simply commit crimes against inmates with no consequences.

[Reason Magazine reports](#) that a new class action lawsuit argues that the Massachusetts Department of Corrections use of an unreliable drug testing system has put innocent people in solitary confinement and falsely accused public defenders of supplying drugs to their clients. These test kits, used nationally, are notorious for false positives. Incarcerated people have no legal right to request outside verification of results, so their mail, work, and education privileges can be revoked, and they can be placed in solitary confinement as punishment despite never possessing drugs.

The Connecticut legislature will not override Governor Ned Lamonts vetoes of four bills, according to [the Hartford Courant](#), including one that would have dramatically changed the states solitary confinement policy. Supporters of the bill stood outside the Capitol every day at the end of the legislative session, urging legislators to override Lamonts veto. In his veto message, Lamont echoed the position of prison staff who had lobbied for the veto, saying, This legislation places unreasonable and dangerous limits on the use of restraints. The bill would have limited solitary confinement, and mandated incarcerated people have a minimum of 6.5 hours out of cell per day.

The ACLU of the District of Columbia is accusing the D.C. Department of Corrections of discrimination because their policy on transgender housing forces individuals into solitary confinement, [reports Metro Weekly](#). Although a policy prioritizing individual preference for gendered housing was instituted last month, transgender people are still housed in protective custody until they receive their housing assignment, which could take up to a week or more. Legal director of the ACLU of DC Scott Michelman stated, Subjecting transgender individuals to what is effectively solitary confinement just because they are transgender is cruel, inhumane, and blatantly discriminatory.

[The Record reports](#) that advocates for immigrant detainees held at the Bergen County Jail in Hackensack, New Jersey, filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that includes allegations of sexual assault, medical and physical abuse, religious discrimination, COVID-19 negligence and generally deplorable conditions. Samah Sisay, a Center for Constitutional Rights attorney, said the 15 immigrants involved in the complaint, who were held at the local jail under contract with ICE, have been subjected to cruel treatment. She said, officials at Bergen continue to silence and retaliate against immigrants through the use of solitary confinement, transfers, beatings, threats, racial slurs, and taunting.

As COVID cases rise throughout the Louisiana prison system, the State Penitentiary at Angolas notorious Camp J will once again be used for isolation, [reports The Advocate](#). The solitary confinement facility was closed in 2018 as part of reform efforts, but was reopened for some time in March of 2020 to house sick individuals. Now, despite objections by advocates, Camp J will house individuals who test positive. As a result of the spike in cases, the state prison system has also suspended prison visits and volunteers until at least August 16th. Individuals transferred to Camp J will be given two free phone calls per week.

Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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.

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