

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 4, 2018

This week, a federal judge ruled that the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) has failed to uphold a 2016 settlement that mandated at least eight hours of out-of-cell time per week for people with mental illness held in solitary confinement. [According](#) to NPR Illinois, about 12,000 out of the 40,000 people incarcerated in Illinois prisons have mental illnesses, and, as of June this year, 900 mentally ill individuals were held in solitary. An independent monitor, Dr. Pablo Stewart, testified that mentally ill people were suffering immensely in solitary and reported that the IDOC failed to abide by 18 out of the 25 provisions in the settlement that would ensure mentally ill people receive adequate care. The IDOC must respond to the court with a proposal within two weeks.

[Shadowproof reported](#) that Josh Schulte, the 30-year-old accused of leaking over 8,000 Vault 7 files to WikiLeaks while he worked at the CIA, has been placed in solitary confinement at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York and allegedly barred from contact with his attorney. Schulte, currently in pretrial detention, wrote a letter to the judge describing the conditions in solitary and pleading for access to his lawyer to prepare his case. Schulte wrote, My fellow slaves constantly scream, pound, and claw at the cages attempting to get attention for basic needs to be fulfilled. I count myself lucky to be able to eat. Schulte says prison officials have placed him in solitary while they investigate him, though he says they have given him no further details or timeline.

The ACLU of New Jersey and the NJ Office of the Public Defender [announced](#) a settlement with Middlesex County Jail, in which the county has agreed to implement new policies, limiting the amount of time people can be held in their cells to 20 hours a day and providing access to recreation, attorneys, and programming for those in solitary. The ACLU calls for the rest of the state to follow the lead of Middlesex County's new policies and calls for the New Jersey legislature to pass the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act, which would prohibit solitary longer than fifteen days and ensure adequate medical and mental health screenings before placement in solitary. The bill could impact about 1,500 people currently held in solitary in New Jersey state and county facilities.

[According](#) to the *Anchorage Daily News*, 27-year-old Doran Jennings died of an apparent suicide in his solitary confinement cell at Spring Creek Correctional Center in Seward, Alaska. It was the third suicide in Alaska's generic xanax pictures mg state prisons this year. On the same day that Jennings died, the *Anchorage Daily News* [had published](#) a long article describing efforts by the superintendent of Spring Creek, which is the state's only maximum security prison, to institute more rehabilitative programming and explore alternatives to solitary confinement.

[A press release](#) from the Society for Neuroscience announced a panel discussion on the neurological impact of solitary confinement, held on November 4 at the Society's annual conference. Neuroscientists Dr. Huda Akil, Dr. Stephanie Cacioppo, and Dr. Richard Smeyne presented new evidence on the impact of loneliness and isolation on the brain, while Jules Lobel of the Center for Constitutional Rights spoke of the potential for using neuroscience in the legal fight against solitary confinement, and Angola 3 member Robert King related his experience of 29 years in solitary confinement. The moderator of the panel, University of Pittsburgh neurologist Dr. Michael Zigmond, said, The potential harm caused by isolation due to incarceration or due to aging or disability is significant and the issues raised today are relevant to the entire population.

The Advocate published a [commentary](#) highlighting the overrepresentation and vulnerability of LGBTQ youth in the juvenile justice system. The author cited a study done by the Juvenile Law Center last year that found the use of solitary confinement to be widespread across juvenile detention facilities and disproportionately used on LGBTQ youth, youth of color, girls, and young people with disabilities. Though some states fail to even record data on LGBTQ youth in the juvenile justice system, the article points to Massachusetts as an example of how meaningful reforms can be reached through combining existing standards with outside experts and staff input.

The Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) [reported](#) that seven people held at Toledo Correctional Institution in Ohio began a hunger strike this weekend in protest of new renovations at the prison to construct additional solitary confinement units. The group claims that people have recently been sent to solitary for minor infractions or for lack of space in other lower security units. One solitary unit, called the 4B Overflow, was allegedly constructed because the 4B Unit, which did not house people in solitary, was full. According to an outside supporter, corrections officers have begun using chemical restraints against those on strike: Everybody got

chemicals on their bodies, eyes nose face, theyre supposed to let them decontaminate but theyre making them sleep in it. They arent letting people file complaints.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

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by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

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