

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | October 28, 2021

An ACLU press release [condemns](#) the use of solitary confinement in ICE detention, citing a recently published report from the Department of Homeland Security on the lack of oversight and transparency for isolation policies in ICE facilities nationwide. The ACLU outlines how ICE frequently fails to document its use of solitary, and fails to follow its own procedures on restrictive housing. According to the press release, ICE and its contractors abuse of solitary confinement, especially against those with mental illness, has led to record levels of death by suicide in recent years. The ACLU calls upon President Biden to follow through on his campaign promises to ban the use of solitary confinement.

The Intercept [obtained](#) a Detainee Death Review for Efran Romera de la Rosa, a man who committed suicide in 2018 while held by ICE in Georgias Stewart Detention Facility, where the investigative review found 22 violations of policy. A total of eight people have died by suicide in Stewart since 2017. Romero spent years in solitary confinement in different detention facilities, and suffered from well documented schizophrenia before being detained by ICE. Romeros family is in an ongoing lawsuit against CoreCivic, the private operator of the facility.

Milwaukee NPR [reports](#) that Wisconsin two youth prisons have remained open despite numerous lawsuits and public pressure to shut them down. The mental health conditions for children incarcerated in the facilities are dire. Solitary Watch [reported](#) that in 2018, Wisconsin ACLU and Juvenile Law Center settled a class action lawsuit against the facility; that settlement brought an outside monitor into the facility for oversight. Although the monitor banned the use of solitary confinement unless children were an active danger to themselves, Kate Burdick from the Juvenile Law Center says that staff continues to put children in isolation excessively. She says, Our concerns are that they may be using it when its not a concern about self harm its not a serious self harm, or its nothing imminent. Complaints from inside the facility also report excessive use of force and little meaningful programming.

Harvard Magazine [covers](#) a lecture given at the Harvard School of Design by Reginald Dwayne Betts about his experience in solitary confinement from a young age, the oppressive architecture of prisons, and the beauty of the prison library that other people in solitary confinement built while he was incarcerated. Betts, who spent nine years in prison beginning at the age of 16, illustrates the contrast between the unnatural space of the prison he was in, and the hand-carved bookshelves that his nonprofit Freedom Reads have been constructing in prisons. He describes one of these bookshelves, saying, It was structured to remind people inside what living feels like. Inside, you kind of forget about the intentionality that is required to grow. Since his release from prison, Betts has earned an MFA in poetry and a law degree from Yale, and last month, [he was awarded](#) a MacArthur Genius grant.

Zachary Swain, who has suffered from self harm while spending years in solitary confinement in Maine, would be released in a new agreement with Knox Countys top prosecutor, if approved by a judge. Seven Days in Solitary has been following Swains story as [reported](#) by Bangor Daily News for several months now, during which time he has gone from solitary confinement, to the hospital to treat severe self-inflicted wounds, and back to solitary. Swain would be released on probation, into mental health treatment. According to Bangor Daily News, Knox Countys prosecutor, who previously wanted him to spend several more years in prison, insisted that more prison time will not make Swain, his prison guards or the community around him safer, and that Swains time in solitary has been torture.

Rachel Riley from the Everett Daily Herald [dives](#) into the different versions of restrictive housing that will continue to exist in Washington State following the DOCs announcement a few weeks ago that the state will end disciplinary solitary. Noting the lack of time limits on administrative segregation, another form of solitary confinement, and the absence of programming and mental health resources, Riley makes it clear that Washington is far from abolishing solitary. According to Rachael Seevers from Disability Rights Washington, there are still a huge number of people who are living in circumstances that we consider to be torture. Riley also cites a bill that was introduced in Washingtons last legislative session that would institute a program-wide two-week limit on solitary confinement.

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.

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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