

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/08/19/civil-rights-groups-demand-change-for-transgender-women-held-in-solitary-in-new-yorks-prisons/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | August 19, 2014



Update, 8/20/14: Yesterday, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project released a new [call to action](#) to Demand Safer Housing for Trans People in New York State Prisons. After once again citing our investigation, SLRP tells the story of Synthia China Blast, a transwoman who has spent a decade in isolation in New York's prisons, with an accompanying video featuring actor and activist Laverne Cox.

The call to action also includes an online [petition](#) for individuals to sign, to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

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Earlier this month, *Solitary Watch* published an [in-depth investigation](#) by Aviva Stahl into the experiences of transgender women held in New York's state prisons. It found that most transwomen in men's prisons were subjected to long-term solitary confinement simply for being themselves. Many also faced sexual assault by staff as well as other prisoners.

Shortly after the investigation was released, four organizations—the National Center for Transgender Equality, Prisoners Legal Services of New York, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and the Trans Women of Color Collective submitted a letter to the Acting Commissioner of New York's Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) citing the article and demanding change.

The women who shared their stories with Solitary Watch described a pattern of automatic, prolonged, and traumatic solitary confinement in men's prisons, the letter reads. Their stories tragically demonstrated that solitary confinement does not prevent sexual abuse and other harms to vulnerable incarcerated persons, but instead inflicts further harm.

The signatories call for DOCCS to take swift and decisive action to ensure full compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act's (PREA) protections for transgender people. Specific demands outlined in the letter include: housing transgender people consistent with their gender identity; establishing *entirely voluntary* transgender housing units; and eliminating the prolonged use of isolation (including disciplinary, administrative segregation, and protective custody) for all individuals.

The letter can be viewed in full [here](#).

Interested parties can write to the Acting Commissioner of DOCCS at the following address: Mr. Anthony J. Annucci, Acting Commissioner, Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, 1220 Washington Avenue, Building 2, Albany, NY 12226-2050.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and

the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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