

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/09/05/texas-senate-hearing-finds-prisoners-released-from-solitary-confinement-directly-to-the-streets/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | September 5, 2012

In Texas, some 8,100 prisoners are in administrative segregation, which is what the state calls solitary confinement. They are held in isolation in cells that measure 6 x 9 feet for 23 hours a day, with one hour to exercise in a small, fenced yard. More than 2,000 of them have a diagnosis of serious mental illness or a developmental disability.

Yesterday, the Criminal Justice Committee of the Texas State Senate held a hearing on solitary confinement, focusing on the states nonexistent reentry program for people getting out of the hole. The leading Texas criminal justice blog, Grits for Breakfast, has a [detailed report on the hearing](#):

In FY 2011, the Texas Senate Criminal Justice Committee was told yesterday, 878 individuals who had been locked up in administrative segregation (commonly referred to as ad seg, which is Texas version of solitary confinement) were released directly to the streets without parole supervision of any type after finishing out their full sentence. Most of these individuals left with \$100 in their pocket and a bus voucher usually to their county of conviction without so much as a photo ID to help them begin the long, difficult path to reintegration into their home communities. Indeed, for mentally ill inmates in ad seg released after serving their full sentence, there is no continuity of care program to ensure they'll continue to receive medication once they're back in the free world. (Such a program exists for inmates released receiving HIV medications, but not for the mentally ill.)

Another 469 individuals during FY 2011 were paroled directly from ad-seg, Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) executive director Brad Livingston told the committee. As was pointed out in Texas Criminal Justice Coalitions [written testimony](#), inmates on parole have the advantage of being able to participate in a District Reentry Center, which generally offers more robust programming and resources during the transition into the community. The greater number, though, who are released directly from ad seg, leave prison completely unsupervised.

Grits also explains how people get put in solitary in Texas, and why they often don't get out until their release from prison:

Sen. Joan Huffman asked Brad Livingston if offenders earn their way into ad seg and he answered, for the most part, yes, but it became clear during questioning, as Chairman Whitmire later noted, that a large number of inmates are placed in solitary due solely to TDCJ's classification judgments as opposed to misbehavior once incarcerated.

There are two ways offenders get into ad seg, Livingston told the committee: Being identified as a member of a security threat group (read: prison gang) or misbehavior, especially violence against staff or other inmates, while locked up. Of those, about 60% are in ad seg because they're members of a security threat group, with the other 40% in ad seg because of their behavior. Those in prison gangs are identified by tattoos, past associations, or their inclusion in the statewide prison and street gang database and may be placed into ad seg from the get-go, sometimes serving their entire sentence start to finish in solitary. Others are identified through gang associations established at their unit, or put there because they're determined to be a threat to prison staff and/or other inmates. According to data provided by TCJC, about one-third of the individuals currently in administrative segregation in Texas were originally incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. Some of those result from misbehavior once inside, but many are there because of alleged gang affiliations. There is a program for gang members to theoretically earn their way off of ad seg called the Gang Renunciation and Disassociation (GRAD) program, but there is a significant waiting list (officials couldn't tell the committee how long it is) and the program's current capacity is only 61 inmates. To enter the program, the inmate must go through a 12-month observation period (until recently it was 24 months) during which it's supposedly determined if the offender has ceased gang-related activity.

Chairman Whitmire suggested many experts would say such an assessment needn't take even 12 months and asked what I thought was a very good question: Given that ad seg inmates are afforded no human contact except with guards, how can they possibly demonstrate gang renunciation? What evidence are you looking for? he asked. The answer was basically monitoring inmate correspondence, in-cell behavior, and assessing their interaction with guards who feed them and take them to their (otherwise solitary) one-hour recreation sessions. That seems like a sparse dataset indeed for making such a judgment.

Henson points to the model of Mississippi, where the number of prisoners in solitary was reduced by 85 percent, and violent incidents subsequently dropped by 70 percent. That's a remarkable achievement, both from a policy and a political perspective. If Mississippi can accomplish that and they're as red as red states come one imagines Texas could safely reduce its ad-seg population as well. Presently, about 1% of Mississippi prisoners are in ad seg units, compared to more than 5% in Texas.

More coverage of the hearing appears in the [Texas Tribune](#) and the [Austin Statesman](#). For more background on solitary in the Lone Star state see our earlier post, [Texas Lockdown](#).

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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A lot of the time I believe they put them in solitary confinement / administration segregation, my son bryce s vandergrift has been in both. I think they place mentally ill in these places, so they don't have to deal with them. Plus, if you have an empty bed then federal funds aren't coming in. My son was/is mentally ill before he was arrested, he was supposed to be covered under The Americans Disability Act. He wasn't covered before, during or after and he's still not covered. Because those in control violate the rights of others. That hasn't changed. To this day, the prison system continues to criminalize mental health.

And years later nothing much has changed. Just more articles, pamphlets, blogs, meetings, videos, group talks, phone calls, letters, emails, faxes oh and donations etc etc etc.

No help for my beloved child. Dear Bryce, I know you can't last much longer. Son, I had no idea what an awful evil world we live in. I think for every good soul born, there are a thousand born with bad souls. We are not all wired the same. I love you with all my heart. I have been able to help you some, but not enough to save you or get you out of prison.

My son bryce vandergrift continues to deteriorate. Who cares about my white boy? Not even god. ????

Most politicians will agree each is Tough on Crime.

There are 3 elements in a crime; 1. something happens; 2. the perpetrator has intent; 3. someone is harmed or their property damaged.

Unless the 3 elements are present there is NO CASE, as there is NO CRIME, because NO ONE harmed or damaged.

Profits are made by the legal Mafia while innocent are jailed for a VICTIMLESS CRIMES which are NON CRIMES.

THE STATE BAR UNION MEMBERS are gaming, preying, feeding, profiting on the innocents these parasites use USURPERS, IMPOSTERS, IMPERSONATORS to bully, beat the naive innocent people into submission.

The game is up the STATE BAR UNION MEMBERS are outed!

WOE TO THE ATTORNEY- G-d.

Great Article Disgusting System!

The Crime Report has two articles on the election platforms of both parties. Excerpts:

Republicans called for more attention to prisoner re-entry to society, saying, Prisons should do more than punish; they should attempt to rehabilitate and institute proven prisoner reentry systems to reduce recidivism and future victimization.

<http://www.thecrimereport.org/news/inside-criminal-justice/2012-08-gop-platform>

Both parties agree on prisoner rehabilitation to reduce recidivism, with President Barack Obamas administration boasting of its creating the Federal Interagency Reentry Council in 2011 to deal with prisoner re-entry. (The Republican administration of George W. Bush initiated the federal Second Chance Act on that subject.)

The Democrats pledge to fight inequalities in our criminal justice system, backing the death penalty but saying it must not be arbitrary.

The Statesman reported:

They cannot be included in regular treatment and rehabilitation programs offered to the states other imprisoned felons because we cant endanger the offenders in general population, Thaler said.

But you can let them discharge onto the street when they finish their sentence, straight from spending every day for 15 years locked up alone in a small cell?

(I question if it is the safety of the other inmates or the guards themselves that they are really worried about? Once the inmates leave prison it is societies problem not theirs.

I think one has to treat the release of a prisoner just like a diver surfaces from a deep dive.

The longer and deeper one has dove into the system the longer the process needs to be when being released. Better that another felon is harmed than innocents on the streets not to mention that it is in everybodys interest that they do not re-offend.)

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