

# 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](#) | April 8, 2019

[According](#) to WBRC, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) released their investigation of the Alabama Department of Corrections, which found violations are severe, systemic, and exacerbated by serious deficiencies in staffing and supervision. The report found a high level of violence that is too common, cruel, of an unusual nature, and pervasive and the use of segregation and solitary confinement to both punish and protect victims of violence and/or sexual abuse. The DOJ additionally found the ADOC to have the highest prison homicide rate in the country, and uncovered 30 deaths unreported by the ADOC. One evident cause of the violations and violence is overcrowding, with Alabamas prisons filled to 165 percent of capacity. The DOJ has given the ADOC 49 days to remedy the constitutional violations before the Attorney General may file a lawsuit.

The *Santa Fe New Mexican* [reported](#) that Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed HB 364 into law last week, which will limit the use of solitary confinement for children, people with mental illness, and pregnant women. The bill defines solitary as confining someone in a cell for at least 22 hours a day without daily, meaningful and sustained human interaction, although it does allow for exceptions. It also mandates the Department of Corrections as well as private prison companies to provide reports on their use of solitary confinement. The legislation follows the publication in late February of a [report by the ACLU of New Mexico](#) that found the state was holding twice as many individuals in solitary as it claimed, and was in the top five states in the nation with the greatest percentage of their prison population in solitary.

WVLT [reported](#) that Tennessee lawmakers failed to pass bill that would have banned shackling pregnant women and prohibited the use of solitary confinement for pregnant and postpartum women. In one case, an incarcerated immigrant woman in Tennessee had endured labor, gave birth, and went through recovery shackled to her hospital bed. A federal judge ultimately ruled that jail officials demonstrated deliberate indifference and the woman received \$490,000 in a settlement of the case. According to the Department of Corrections, about five or six women give birth a year while in their custody.

*Connecticut News Junkie* [reported](#) that despite 2017 legislation banning the use of solitary confinement on youth in Connecticut, state Child Advocate Sarah Egan found that teenage boys are being isolated for up to 23.5 hours a day at the Manson Youth Institute. Egan testified before state legislatures Judiciary Committee that the facility denied using solitary, calling the practice Confined to Quarters Extended. According to Egan's investigation, most of the boys held in isolation needed special education or mental health services. A new bill pending in the state legislature would prohibit the use of solitary confinement for all incarcerated people in the Connecticut. The states Commissioner of Corrections submitted testimony opposing the bill, stating that a ban on solitary would present safety concerns and that no state in the country operates its prisons without the use of solitary.

[According](#) to *Westword*, legislation has been introduced in Colorado that would seek to keep people with severe behavioral health disorders out of local jails by improving access to mental health services for Medicaid recipients. The article tells the story of one 27-year-old man diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder with a history of suicide attempts and substance abuse, who was initially arrested for shoplifting and was denied his medications. He ended up fighting with staff and was placed in solitary for seven months at the El Paso County Criminal Justice Center in Colorado Springs, and now faces further criminal charges. The bill in the legislature comes ten years after the state faced a lawsuit from Disability Law Colorado, challenging the states warehousing of people with mental illness in jails without providing any treatment or meaningful evaluation, and many of the same problems remain.

*USA Today* [reported](#) on 23-year-old Plush Dozier, who has not yet been convicted of any charges, but was transferred from a county jail to Attica state prison because the jail did not have the resources to treat his severe mental health conditions. Dozier has been in solitary confinement at Attica since September 28, 2018. The New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision claims the maximum-security facility offers the highest level of mental health care, but Dozier's family says that he faces abuse from staff and has become suicidal since his incarceration and other men incarcerated with him have sent notarized letters saying the same thing. Tyrell Muhammad from the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement, which supports the HALT Solitary Confinement Act which would ban solitary completely for people with psychiatric disabilities, said: Its preposterous. He needs competent mental health professionals to serve him and he is not going to get that in a state prison.

[According](#) to *Common Dreams*, Chelsea Manning was released into general population after spending four weeks in solitary confinement at the William G. Truesdale Adult Detention Center in Virginia. Manning, who had spent months in solitary during her original prison sentence, had received attention from celebrities and political figures, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In a tweet, Ocasio-Cortez wrote, Chelsea Manning has been trapped in solitary confinement for refusing to answer questions before a Grand Jury. Solitary confinement is torture. Chelsea is being tortured for whistleblowing, she should be released on bail, and we should ban extended solitary in the U.S.

The *Huffington Post* [reported](#) that Pete Buttigieg, a 2020 presidential candidate and current mayor of South Bend, Indiana, called for an end to the death penalty and the use of solitary confinement during his speech at the National Action Network Convention in New York City last week. He said, As we work to end mandatory minimums for nonviolent offenses, as we work to put an end to prolonged solitary confinement, which is a form of torture, here too we must be intentional about fixing disparities that have strong and deeply unfair racial consequences.

CBS's 60 Minutes [covered](#) a therapeutic incentive-based program called T.R.U.E. implemented two years ago after the warden closed down the solitary confinement unit at Cheshire Correctional Institution in Connecticut. T.R.U.E., short for truthful, respectful, understanding, and elevating to success, operates through a rehabilitative approach modeled after a German prison. The program provides opportunities for 50 incarcerated young men between the ages of 18 and 25 years old to connect with a mentor serving a life sentence. The young men develop skills through classes, partake in intensive counseling, and interact with correctional officials on a more human level. So far, the warden says the program has shown successful results and there hasn't been a single fist fight or assault on staff.

Sheriff Tom Dart of Cook County, Illinois, wrote a *Washington Post* [op-ed](#) calling for administrators of other jails across the country to end the use of solitary confinement. Dart says his jail in Chicago faces the challenge of housing members of street gangs, people with mental illness, and people awaiting trial for up to ten years, and contends with the constant threat of violence. Yet, he says, The solution to that violence is not solitary confinement. For three years, Dart has implemented a Special Management Unit (SMU) where people with disciplinary infractions or violent behaviors socialize with other detained people, remain supervised by trained staff, and receive mental health sessions, classes, and programming. Dart says, Since we introduced this model to our jail, detainee-on-detainee assaults have dropped significantly and assaults on staff plummeted.

In a multi-part series, Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) [published](#) the findings of their investigation into deaths in local county jails across the U.S. Pacific Northwest. According to the investigation, since 2008, at least 306 people have died in the custody of county jails in Oregon and Washington, but the current system conceals the true circumstances of these deaths. OPB found that 70 percent of people were awaiting trial when they died in Northwest jails. Additionally, more than 40 percent of deaths occurred within the person's first week, with a third of all deaths occurring even before the person had been detained for three days, and half of the deaths for which the cause was known were suicides. The investigation provided no statistics on how many deaths occurred in solitary confinement, but in many of the stories described, individuals were alone in their cells at the time of death, often contending with untreated physical or mental illness. Many of these deaths, the investigation found, were clearly preventable, yet jail death rates in the region continue to rise.

Valerie Kiebal 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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

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