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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 [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 7, 2018

The Vera Institute of Justice, in partnership with the University of Michigan Law School and the Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights, launched a new section of its Safe Alternatives to Segregation Resource Center. Called [Promising Practices](#), the new section compiles information on reform efforts and alternatives to solitary confinement that have been implemented in various correctional facilities across the country. Vera's [Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative](#) notes: Our goal is for the section to serve as a resource to corrections systems interested in implementing concrete policies and practices to safely reduce their use of restrictive housing and to improve conditions in restrictive housing settings. We also encourage agencies who have made successful reforms to submit their own promising practices, [through the website](#), for consideration.

[According](#) to the *Washington Post*, the Department of Homeland Security released a report last week after auditing an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Adelanto, California, run by private prison company GEO Group. The report found improper and overly restrictive use of solitary confinement, untimely and inadequate medical care (including a complete lack of dental care), and nooses hanging from 15 out of the 20 inspected cells, which guards told auditors is not a high priority. During the audit, fourteen immigrants were being held in solitary without having been found guilty of breaking any rules. One disabled man was found locked in solitary for nine days, during which he never left his wheelchair to sleep in a bed or brush his teeth. The inspectors concluded the egregious conditions, including the use of solitary and the denial of linguistic interpretation for those in solitary, violated ICE standards.

Without warning or announcement, the Trump administration has changed the content and language of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) website, including the agency's vision statement, which used to say the U.S. aims to be a nation where our children are healthy, educated, and free from violence and now describes a nation where our children are free from crime and violence, invoking an undertone of fear over rehabilitation and dignity. *The Guardian* [reported](#) that an OJJDP page titled Eliminating solitary confinement for youth, which called for an end to the use of solitary for children, has been entirely eliminated, as has the page Girls and the Juvenile Justice System, which provided data and guidance for young women on how to navigate the criminal justice system. Additionally, the OJJDP has terminated research projects aimed at addressing the disproportionate incarceration of people of color.

[According](#) to *Truthout*, people incarcerated in the 75 prisons operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) have been suffering a heat crisis, with lack of air conditioning, lack of respite areas, and lack of clean, cold water. While a lawsuit last year prompted new procedures to alleviate the intensity of the heat, numerous incarcerated people have reported that the mitigation measures have not reached their facilities, especially the solitary confinement units. One man incarcerated at the Eastham Unit explained, Sure, they have respite areas for population. But not for Ad-Seg [solitary]. Another incarcerated man at the Telford Unit said he received threats of being handcuffed, gassed, beat up and thrown in lock up [solitary] for requesting to go to a respite area 20 feet away. The lawsuit cited 23 deaths in TDCJ custody from heat-related causes since 1998, 11 of which occurred in the summer of 2011.

In a [story](#) published by *Buzz Feed* and excerpted from the recently released collection of oral histories *Six by Ten: Stories from Solitary*, Sonya Calico, a Latina transgender woman who spent nine months in solitary confinement, recalls the abuse she faced while incarcerated and her experience in protective custody. She said, In jail it seemed like they had a rule that every time someone who's transgender goes in, if they have body work, they automatically go straight to solitary. It was discrimination. People don't understand that solitary confinement really messes people's heads up. It really does. Calico described some of the lasting effects from her time in solitary after her release, including an inability to function in large groups of people or even eat dinner with her family.

University of California, Davis, professor of sociology Caitlin Patler and co-authors Jeff Sacha and Nicholas Branich published a journal article, [The Black Box Within a Black Box: Solitary Confinement Practices in a Subset of U.S. Immigration Detention Facilities](#), that revealed 1,193 incidents of solitary confinement in six Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities in California between 2013 and 2016. The article cites a Freedom of Information Act request that additionally revealed disproportionate use of solitary confinement based on gender and mental illness, as well as extensive use of solitary confinement for protective custody [which shows] that this category is potentially punitive in nature.

The *Las Cruces Sun-News* published an [editorial](#) calling for reform legislation to eliminate solitary confinement in New Mexico, especially in light of the cases of two incarcerated men, Stephen Slevin and Isaiah Trinity Cabrales. Slevin received such poor medical care during his 22 months in solitary at the Doña Ana County jail that he had to pull his own tooth and was later awarded \$22 million in a lawsuit. Cabrales, a 20-year-old with signs of mental illness, committed suicide this summer during his seventh months of solitary at the Penitentiary of New Mexico. The editorial states: We understand that officer safety must be considered in any actions the state takes. But, we believe that can be accomplished without the debilitating use of solitary confinement.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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