

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](#) | September 17, 2020

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) [reported](#) that plaintiffs in the 2015 landmark settlement of the class action lawsuit *Ashker v. Governor of California* filed a petition for the full Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to review a decision by a three-judge panel, which reversed a lower court in ruling that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) had not violated the terms of the settlement. In the original settlement, CDCR agreed to end the use of indefinite solitary confinement and transfer the plaintiffs from the Security Housing Unit (SHU), to the general prison population. But attorneys from the CCR argued that while they may have left the SHU, their clients in many cases continue to be held alone in their cells for over 22 hours a day. They assert that regardless of what their housing unit is called, the men remain in conditions of solitary confinement, in violation of the settlement.

Jewish Currents published an [article](#) written by [Christopher Blackwell](#), an incarcerated journalist held at Washington State's Monroe Correctional Complex (MCC). Blackwell explains the measures that the administration and staff at MCC have taken in response to COVID-19, namely placing people in solitary confinement as either quarantine or medical isolation. One incarcerated man, LJ, said he has spent most of the last 90 days on 23/1 lockdown, though the administration claims his isolation is not punitive. LJ works in the medical area, which puts him in contact with many sick people, resulting in his continued placement in quarantine. LJ said the quarantine is supposed to last for 14 days, but more than once, he has been left in solitary longer than that. Once you have mentally prepared yourself to only do 14 days, there is nothing worse than when you are still sitting there on day 15 and 16, LJ said.

The City [reported](#) that the implementation of new regulations on the use of solitary confinement in New York State prisons, proposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo last year, have been delayed another year until 2023. The regulations would limit the use of solitary to 30 days at a time, though advocates have pointed out loopholes that could still allow people to be held in solitary indefinitely. Currently the average stay in a special housing unit or SHU cell is 70 days, and there is no limit on the amount of time someone can be held in solitary. The Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act would have restricted the use of solitary to 15 days, but despite having enough support to pass the bill last year, legislative leaders and the governor chose not to bring it to a vote and instead wrote their own regulations. Phil Desgranges, an attorney with the NYCLU, called for the passage of the HALT Act and said, A year later, we are in no better position to end the inhumane use of solitary in New York state.

Truthout published an [article](#) by Victoria Law about incarcerated people pushing back against prison administrations' faulty responses to the coronavirus. Esther Arias was placed in solitary confinement for three weeks at a federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut, after livestreaming a video call with her son on Facebook, in which she described the conditions in the prison. Soon after, Danbury was found to have among the highest concentrations of positive tests per capita of any federal prison, according to a lawsuit. Arias says she was isolated because, They said I was the reason they were getting so much attention. Women at the Indiana Women's Prison filed complaints en masse and contacted people on the outside to expose the crisis they faced, locked in their cells without running water or an emergency call button in the extreme heat. On July 23, the Indiana Department of Corrections reversed the closed-door policy and now women are forced to keep their doors open, under threat of punishment.

Valerie Kiebala 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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Fci Phoenix Shu isolation two 15 min phone calls a month and more than 500 miles from family. No commissary no light all due to collateral consequences and denied bail pending appeal possession 922g1.

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