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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | December 24, 2017

Arthur Johnson, a 65-year-old man currently serving a life sentence at State Correctional Institution Greene in Pennsylvania, was awarded \$325,000 in a settlement for being subjected to 37 years of solitary confinement. Johnson claimed in the lawsuit that the prolonged solitary confinement constituted cruel and unusual punishment and violated his due process rights. Its been a year since Johnson returned to general population, and one of Johnsons attorneys from the Abolitionist Law Center[explained](#) to the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, Its been a big adjustment, being surrounded by so many people in the yard, in the cafeteria. A relief, to be sure, but the scars of an entire adult life spent with little human contact persist.

The Atlantic [reported](#) on the effect that the lack of education has on children held in juvenile detention, especially those held in solitary, many of whom have learning or cognitive disabilities. The article notes that children are often sent to solitary confinement for behaviors that in traditional schools might not even be reprimanded, such as being restless in class, talking back, or refusing to participate if they dont understand or are frustrated by a lesson. One youth said of his time in solitary confinement: We had no schooling when I was in lockdown, maybe a book if a friend had one to share. As a result of recent lawsuits, three juvenile facilities have agreed to modify their education and solitary confinement procedures: Lancaster facility in Los Angeles County agreed to provide every child full days of schooling, Contra Costa County in California agreed to end their use of solitary confinement for minors, and Onondaga County in New York also agreed to end juvenile solitary confinement and increase access to special-education.

Rewire [reported](#) that Disability Rights California (DRC) filed a lawsuit earlier this month on behalf of five disabled individuals asserting that unhealthy conditions at Santa Barbara County Jail inflicted cruel and unusual punishment, infringed upon due process rights, and discriminated against disabled individuals, in violation of the 8th and 14th Amendments and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The lawsuit claims that individuals at the Santa Barbara facility are subjected to solitary confinement, called Safety Cells, with only a hole in the floor for a toilet, and that individuals with mental health issues are denied confidential meetings with mental health professionals. The article noted the federal governments estimate that approximately 40 percent of jail prisoners have one or more disabilities, although over half of the individuals held at Santa Barbara had visited the countys Department of Behavioral Wellness prior to entering the prison system.

The Nation [covered](#) a rally outside of New York Governor Andrew Cuomos office urging him to pass the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, which would limit time in isolation to 15 days and develop alternatives to solitary confinement. Among the protestors were Jessica Concepcion, who spent Christmas 2006 in solitary at the maximum-security Bedford Hills facility in New York, and her wife Xena Grandichelli, who also spent time in solitary. The New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement, which organized the rally, is urging Cuomo to spend one night in solitary in one of New Yorks prisons, as corrections chief Rick Raemisch did in Colorado.

The Star Tribune [published](#) the story of Keegan Rolenc, who recently re-entered society after spending a year in Minnesotas harshest solitary confinement unit. After he was released, a Rice County Judge commended Rolenc for surviving the prolonged solitary confinement: After reading about it I can only say that thats barbaric treatment. My hat is off to you for not incurring any more time while you were there. You kept your cool. I dont know how you did it. While the Minnesota Department of Corrections has since prohibited stays longer than 90 days in solitary, the *Star Tribune* found that over a six-year period, 700 people had been released directly from isolation in Minnesota. In Rolencs case, his time in solitary still causes him difficulty in social situations and continual challenges finding a job.

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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