

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/04/04/immigrant-hunger-strikers-placed-solitary-confinement-federal-detention-center/>

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close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella](#) | April 4, 2014



Nearly a month ago, [at least 750 immigrant detainees](#) at the federal government's Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, went on hunger strike. The strike included about half the detainees at the 1,500-bed facility, which is run by the [GEO Group](#), the nation's second largest private prison contractor. Individuals are held at the detention center pending investigation for possible deportation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

According to participants, the hunger strikers were protesting the national policy of mass deportation, as well as their conditions, food, and low pay received for work they perform at the detention center. Eventually, most of the strikers resumed eating, but on March 24, a smaller group began a second hunger strike.

Three days later, ICE began placing these hunger strikers in solitary confinement, where they are isolated for at least 23 hours a day and deprived of all contact with other detainees. According to a [lawsuit filed yesterday](#) in Federal District Court in Tacoma by the ACLU of Washington and Columbia Legal Services:

The Plaintiffs represented by ACLU-WA and CLS were placed in solitary confinement after corrections officers entered their living area and invited approximately 20 detainees to meet with an assistant warden to discuss their reasons for engaging in a hunger strike. The Plaintiffs and other detainees who volunteered to attend the meeting were immediately placed in handcuffs and taken to individual isolation cells. Plaintiffs were not told why they were placed in solitary confinement nor how long they would have to live in isolation.

The form of solitary confinement used by ICE, administrative segregation, does not require due process because it is supposed to be non-punitive. However, it appears that ICE's placement of Plaintiffs and other detainees in administrative segregation is in fact punishment and retaliation for engaging in constitutionally protected free speech activities.

The ACLU and CLS are [seeking a temporary restraining order](#) (TRO) to prohibit ICE from retaliating against the hunger strikers, whom they say are engaging in a peaceful protest and are protected by the First Amendment.

There is some precedent for [immigrant detainees staging hunger strikes](#) to protest conditions and being placed in solitary in retaliation. A [2012 report](#) by the National Immigrant Justice Center and Physicians for Human Rights described the widespread use of solitary confinement in immigrant detention.

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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Immigrants suffer enough without their hardships being exacerbated by this type of abuse. For shame!

Americans keep their own people in isolation, when they remedy our own citizens then maybe things will change, immigrants probably have a better shot than we do of getting out of isolation.

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