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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](#) | January 21, 2018

WTOP [reported](#) the suicide of 20-year-old Jordyn Charity, who had been held at the supermax Red Onion State Prison in Virginia. Charity was convicted of murder at age 16 and was serving a 168-year sentence. The Virginia Department of Corrections has not revealed whether Charity was being held in solitary confinement. Though officials at the Red Onion facility have claimed a significant reduction in the use of solitary confinement since 2011, the Charlottesville Legal Aid Center has still been receiving complaints about the facility's use of solitary confinement.

[According](#) to the *Miami New Times*, individuals incarcerated in the Florida state prison system began a labor strike, called #OperationPUSH, on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The strike aims to pressure the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) to pay fair wages to incarcerated laborers, stop abuse by corrections officers, implement fair prices for basic food and hygienic items, and institute voting rights for former felons. Organizers of the strike have faced placement in close-management units, another name for solitary confinement. The Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) shared on Twitter on that The number is now in the dozens of suspected organizers who were placed in solitary as much as two weeks before MLK Day.

The *Daily Beast* published the [story](#) of Iraqi immigrant Safaa Al Shakarchi, currently held at Laredo Processing Center, operated in Texas by private prison contractor CoreCivic. Safaa, his wife Zinah, and their two children fled persecution in both Iraq and the United Arab Emirates, only to be turned down for asylum at the U.S. border and detained in Texas. According to the story, at Laredo, Safaa now faces mistreatment and intimidation, including staff placing him in solitary confinement and lowering the temperature in his cell in an attempt to break his hunger strike. While CoreCivic did not respond to questions about Safaa's hunger strike, a study conducted by Project South and Penn State Laws Center for Immigrant Rights Clinic revealed that individuals at another CoreCivic facility, Stewart Detention Center in Georgia, have faced time in solitary confinement for participating in hunger strikes.

After a federal judge ruled that Harris County, Texas, had been implementing unconstitutional bail practices, six individuals at Dallas County Jail filed a lawsuit this week, claiming that Dallas County unconstitutionally discriminates against poor individuals who don't have the ability to pay bail, while individuals with enough money can avoid jail time. One of the plaintiffs Shannon Davies, a 47-year-old transgender woman, has been placed in solitary confinement in the mens unit since Wednesday with a \$500 misdemeanor bond that she doesn't have the money to pay. Trisha Trigilio, an attorney at ACLU of Texas, [told](#) the *Texas Tribune*, The system is really devastating for the people who can't afford to purchase their freedom.

As the *Canadian Lawyer* [reported](#), in a landmark case this week, the Canadian Supreme Court ruled solitary confinement unconstitutional in federal prisons and called for the government to carry out a legislative response within a year. The director of litigation for West Coast Legal Action and Education Fund (LEAF) highlighted the importance of this ruling for especially vulnerable populations, as well as for all incarcerated people: The judgment found that the use of solitary confinement against indigenous prisoners and prisoners with mental illness is discriminatory. It further disadvantages those already disadvantaged groups. She went on to say that It's an opportunity for Canada to step up and do so much better than we've done in the past for people in prisons.

Rewire [reported](#) the case of Laura Monterrosa, a Salvadoran woman held at T. Don Hutto Detention Center in Texas, who attempted suicide after being forced to remain in the same space as a guard who continually sexually assaulted her, despite her complaints and allegations of abuse. After finally receiving medical care that was initially denied by both Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and CoreCivic, the private prison company that runs the detention center, Monterrosa was placed in solitary confinement upon her return to Hutto following her suicide attempt. Monterrosa said that she faced medical confinement, a form of solitary confinement that she has experienced twice since her arrival eight months ago. Under the Trump administration, conditions at ICE detention centers have declined, as ICE has received preliminary approval to destroy records of deaths, sexual assaults, and the use of solitary confinement.

An exhibit of [Photo Requests from Solitary](#), a project sponsored by Solitary Watch, opened in the art gallery at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, New York, as described in an article in [Newsday](#). The project invites individuals in solitary confinement to request photographs of anything they would like to see, and finds photographers to make the images. The project serves as a reminder that even though they're surrounded by gray walls, they have a complete inner life going on, said Solitary Watch's Jean

Casella, one of the curators of the project, at the exhibits opening. Other speakers at the opening included the parents of Benjamin Van Zandt, who was sent to prison as a teenager and placed in solitary despite his history of mental illness; he took his own life at age 21. Attendees were urged to support the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, a bill currently pending in the New York State Legislature that would prohibit the use of solitary beyond 15 days.

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

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