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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 [Aviva Stahl](#) | January 10, 2016

An op-ed published in the [New York Times](#) by legal scholars Michele Deitch and Michael Mushlin called for independent oversight of New York's prisons, which would be an addition to the two years of monitoring required in the recent settlement to reduce and restrict the use of solitary confinement. If harm is to be prevented in these dark places, they write, we must know what is happening inside. The editorial board at the [Washington Post](#) also covered and applauded changes to New York's use of solitary.

[The Marshall Project](#) interviewed Travis Dusenbury, who spent ten years in the federal supermax in Florence, Colorado. He explains, I think most people take it for granted that they are human, but when you get to the ADX, you realize that being human isn't a birthright.

An investigation produced by [the Marshall Project](#) examined reforms to solitary confinement instituted at Alger Correctional Facility, in Michigan's upper peninsula, then applied in prisons across the state. The step-down program pioneered at Alger created a system of six stages that the men could pass through on their way from solitary to a lower-security status.

A series of assaults on correctional officers at Rikers Island has prompted New York City's Correction Department [to request a delay](#) in the plan to eliminate solitary confinement for people age 18-21, which was meant to go into effect on the first of this year. Corrections Commissioner Ponte said that after recent attacks on staff, the confidence of the staff to move this project forward was a bit shaken, and the Department is seeking to implement the plan in June.

[Hearings continue in the case of Isaiah McCoy](#), who spent years on death row and in solitary confinement before his conviction was overturned. In August, Judge Robert Young ordered McCoy released from isolation while he awaited retrial; the judge has since found that McCoy must have access to the prison library and face-to-face, private meetings with his attorneys.

The family of Jimariya Davidson [has filed a federal lawsuit](#), charging the teen endured cruel and unusual punishment before his April 2015 suicide at the Metro Regional Youth Detention Center in Atlanta. According to the lawsuit, Davidson was kept in solitary confinement for days with no exercise, showers or even a functioning toilet, and that rather than address [Davidson's] basic needs, the staff routinely locked him in solitary confinement and neglected to provide him with required exercise, education, and even showers.

The Texas Commission on Jail Standards has revised its one-page intake form, [which one outlet has called](#) the only tangible policy change since Sandra Bland's apparent suicide in the Waller County jail in July. The new form is supposed to better identify people who may be suicidal, although advocates warn that placing people in isolation may actually increase their risk of self-harm.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. She's written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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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