

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2015/06/05/new-report-highlights-10-destructive-myths-about-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Hallie Grossman](#) | June 5, 2015



As the first in a planned series of reports, the Vera Institute for Justice's Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative has published [Solitary Confinement: Common Misconceptions and Emerging Safe Alternatives](#). As noted in the [overview](#) to the report:

Evidence mounts that the practice produces many unwanted and harmful outcomes for the mental and physical health of those placed in isolation, for the public safety of the communities to which most will return, and for the corrections budgets of jurisdictions that rely on it for facility safety. Yet solitary confinement remains a mainstay of prison management and control in the U.S. largely because many policymakers, corrections officials, and members of the general public still subscribe to some or all of the common misconceptions and misguided justifications addressed in this report.

The misconceptions in the report represent how the public perceives solitary confinement in its ideal form: People in prison are sent to solitary, or segregated housing, for a short period of time as punishment for an infraction, to keep them safe from the general population, or if they are considered the worst of the worst. The report points out that, in practice, the system rarely works as such; furthermore, not only do alternatives yield better results, they are also less expensive. The Vera Institute for Justice has partnered with five states (Illinois, Maryland, Washington, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania) in hopes of creating a safer alternatives model for other US jurisdictions. This endeavor, which began as the [Segregation Reduction Project](#), seeks to decrease the number of individuals held in solitary confinement through providing site-specific recommendations and maintaining assistance throughout the process.

The report includes data and research based analyses of each misconception; for example, it cites research stating that contrary to popular belief, most individuals in solitary confinement are placed there as a precautionary measure rather than as punishment for an infraction. Moreover, taking a worst of the worst approach to treating these individuals often leads to increased violence in the future instead of a reduction. In terms of decreasing the use of solitary confinement, the report states, Colorado has decreased its use of segregated housing by 85 percent and prisoner-on-staff assaults are the lowest they have been since 2006.

Another important point in the report is its mention of mental health considerations in prison. It cites the Skill Building Unit in Washington state, which houses incarcerated people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in a general population setting. The unit has programs dedicated to meeting their needs and trains corrections officers specifically for this type of work. The Washington Department of Corrections has reported both safer living and working conditions for incarcerated individuals and staff, respectively.

There is also a section dedicated to the misconceptions regarding cost. The dominant ideology is that safe alternatives are more expensive, but the costs of solitary confinement are much higher than housing the general prison population. According to 2013 estimations, the daily cost per inmate at the supermax facility was \$216.12, while the general cost was \$85.74.

Safer alternatives are provided amidst descriptions of the misconceptions. They do not receive detailed attention in this report, but may feature more prominently in future reports. The Safe Alternatives to Segregation project is now at work in a [second round](#) of jurisdictions, including state corrections departments in Nebraska, Oregon, and North Carolina, and local departments in New York City and Middlesex County, New Jersey.

Hallie Grossman was a research and reporting intern for Solitary Watch and now works in communications at DKC in New York.

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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