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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 [Roxanne Barnes](#) | September 5, 2021

[The New York Times reports](#) that federal officials announced the temporary closure of the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC), a federal jail in Lower Manhattan. They have described it as part of an effort to improve conditions at the jail, which have been dangerous for years, but only received widespread attention in 2019 after the suicide of Jeffrey Epstein while he was held pretrial. A year earlier, Aviva Stahl [chronicled](#) the conditions at the jail for Gothamist. Among the abuses she documented was the extreme and total isolation practiced in 10 South, a jail-within-a-jail where people charged with terrorism and other serious offenses were held. One man locked up in 10 South for a year and a half described the toll it took on him. I been around in this world, almost a decade in a war zone seen my part of torture and bad prisons, I was in jungles and deserts, he wrote. But the time I spent in 10 South took a large chunk of my soul, it is a very bleak place by design.

Spurred by reports of unsafe conditions and illegal shackling and solitary confinement of mothers in Lee Arrendale, Georgias largest womens prison, seven state legislators attempted to make a surprise visit and were turned away, [reports the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). The Southern Center for Human Rights, which has been tracking abuses within Lee Arrendale, sent [a letter](#) in April to the warden condemning the mistreatment during the pandemic. Page Dukes from the Southern Center said that, [GDOC] has placed COVID patients, along with women who just gave birth, into solitary confinement rather than getting them the treatment they need and deserve. Weve received several reports of women left in the same bloody clothes they were wearing during childbirth, for days. With this kind of neglect routinely taking place, its no wonder that Georgias prisons have had so many deaths among incarcerated people and staff.

[The Bangor Daily News reports](#) that the state has reached a settlement in a case against the Maine Department of Corrections that will place limits on the use of solitary confinement in state prisons. Seven years ago, Doug Burr, who was serving a prison sentence, was accused of trafficking drugs inside Maine State Prison, and although no evidence was ever brought against him, he was placed in administrative segregation with no ability to call his wife and limited access to showers and recreation. Under the terms of the settlement, the state must provide more training to disciplinary hearing officers, and no individual can be held in isolation for more than 30 days without express approval from the corrections commissioner. Further, no one can be held in solitary confinement for refusing to admit to an alleged wrongdoing.

[Youth Today reports](#) that the Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform has announced a training for juvenile justice executives, detention staffers, and members of youth justice nonprofits entitled, Ending Isolation in Youth Facilities. Georgetown is partnering with Arnold Ventures, the Center for Childrens Law and Policy and Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators to create a week-long curriculum that focuses on reducing the use of solitary confinement in youth detention. The Georgetown Centers priority in these reforms is connecting young people to, educational opportunities, opportunities for skills development and relationship building, says the Centers director Michael Umpierre. He continued, If were isolating them, they will not get that.

Over 200 men have been held in solitary confinement in Washington State prisons for two years or more as a result of pandemic mismanagement, according to a recent [Op-Ed in the South Seattle Emerald](#). In the past, when individuals were transferred to solitary confinement in Washington they were enrolled in a behavioral management course, which lasted less than a year and granted them eventual re-entry to general population. During the pandemic, however, the Department of Corrections has responded to COVID by slashing class sizes in half, creating waitlists at least a year long for courses. This information comes from a letter that a man currently on one of these waitlists wrote to his mother, where he outlined the injustice of the situation. His mother subsequently circulated the letter, which states, By the time someone completes the 3-month course and transfers, they will have spent 2 years in solitary confinement. Keeping people in the hole for that long because of COVID[-19] is unacceptable.

[A new report in the journal Health and Justice](#) examines a step down reentry program in a restrictive housing unit at the Snake River Correctional Institute in Oregon. The Step Up Program (SUP), which was launched in early 2020, was intended to alleviate the harms of solitary confinement, improve living conditions, and, through rehabilitative programming, enable people to eventually return to the general prison population or life outside of prison with greater ease and success. Although COVID-19 disrupted the study, researchers found through interviews that individuals in the less restrictive housing preferred their living conditions, appreciated the incentives for positive behavior, and gave mixed reviews on the value of the programs available to them.

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Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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