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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](#) | November 27, 2016

A [report](#) was released examining the disproportionate and discriminatory placement of people with disabilities in Washington's jails. Cruel But Not Unusual, which was published by the non-profit Disability Rights Washington, also identifies best practices and recommendations for reform.

Whistleblower Chelsea Manning has formally asked President Obama [to grant her clemency](#). Manning, who is transgender, has endured long stretches in solitary confinement, and recently tried to commit suicide when she was placed back in isolation.

Prisoners at Rikers Island perceived to be aggressive are being shackled to restraint desks rather than placed in solitary confinement, according to the [New York Daily News](#). Advocates are concerned about how the restraints will be used, including Sarah Kerr of the Legal Aid Society Prisoners Rights Project. DOC is creating extreme, harsh housing conditions, including shackling and restraints that will be imposed on individuals indefinitely leaving them in restraints and irons everywhere.

Rikers Island staff are placing people who are considered especially dangerous or vulnerable in a separate facility without access to required services including access to a law library, group religious services and sufficient amount of time outside of their cells, according to the [Wall Street Journal](#). It's very clear that people who need protective custody do not need to be locked in 23 hours a day without programs, said Board of Correction member Robert Cohen.

[The New York Review of Books](#) published a review of Hell is a Very Small Place, a collection of essays by men and women who have been held in solitary confinement. Solitary will end only when the public demands it, writes reviewer and lawyer Martin Garbus. Franz Kafka wrote that a book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us, he adds. This book may be such an instrument. The book was edited by Solitary Watch's Jean Casella, James Ridgeway and Sarah Shourd.

Alleged British hacker Lauri Love may [endure years](#) in pre-trial solitary confinement if extradited to the US, according to his American lawyer Tor Ekeland. Love, who has Aspergers Syndrome, would face three trials and 99 years on the inside if found guilty of the charges.

Vermont has almost completely ceased to use a unit for prisoners with mental illness, where people have been held in solitary confinement for up to 23 hours per day. The 10-bed Alpha Unit at the Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield has been largely vacant since mid-September, according to the local [Valley News](#).

The University of Texas at Austin School of Law has released a [report](#) analyzing the deaths of ten people held in the states' jails, including that of Eric Sykes, who hung himself while in solitary confinement. The report concludes that county jails should reduce the use of solitary confinement and improve policies and training on the use of force against prisoners with mental illness, according to a [local outlet](#).

Pennsylvania has dropped so-called nutritional loaves from their prison menus. The loaves, which were provided as punishment to those already in solitary confinement, will now be replaced by bagged lunches. [Pennlive.com](#) also reports that the state is making other changes to how isolation operates in the states' facilities, including alterations to the cells and common spaces in restricted housing units, expansion of a program that uses trained inmates to help other inmates experiencing a mental health crisis, and introducing educational programs and activities that can safely be provided in these units.

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.

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by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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