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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Lisa Dawson](#) | September 4, 2013



The following roundup features noteworthy news, reports and opinions on solitary confinement from the past month that have not been covered in other Solitary Watch posts.

According to the [tally](#) kept by the *Miami Herald*, 35 of the 166 men held captive at Guantanamo are engaged in a hunger strike, with 32 being force-fed and one hospitalized. Most recently, the *Herald* [reports](#) on the Pentagon's announcement that the US has sent two Algerian detainees home from the detention center, making it the first detainee transfer from Guantanamo in almost a year.

The *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* [reports](#) that two families have filed lawsuits against Pennsylvania's Armstrong County Jail following the suicides of Tyler Emigh and Tyler Watterson, both of whom were being held in solitary confinement at the time of their death.

The *Los Angeles Times* [reports](#) that California senator Loni Hancock and assemblyman Tom Ammiano have announced hearings over the brutal prison conditions face by people incarcerated in the state.

The *Nation* [discusses](#) potential avenues California prison hunger strikers can take in light of Governor Jerry Brown's hardline position. According to the story, only a fast-track restoration of checks and balances by the courts and legislature, propelled by public questioning, might yield a breakthrough.

Alternet [reports](#) that a 23-year-old man arrested for a misdemeanor died in his solitary confinement cell in an Illinois jail. According to the story, the 7th Circuit denied immunity to a doctor and nurse over the death of a schizophrenic prisoner whose diabetes went untreated.

Democracy Now! [airs](#) a recording of Todd Ashker, one of the authors of the call for prisoners to hunger strike who is currently held in SHU at Pelican Bay. In the recorded statement, Ashker discusses his motivation behind hunger striking and events leading to the creation of the formal complaint by prisoners. A script of the extended audio can be viewed [here](#).

The *Associated Press* [reports](#) that a US judge has ordered officials at North Carolina's Central Prison to save video from surveillance cameras in the prison's solitary confinement unit where [eight prisoners say](#) corrections officers beat them.

In a [piece](#) responding to a court order [approving](#) the force-feeding of prison hunger strikers, *Al Jazeera America* discusses the issue of forcing prisoners to live in a dying situation. The story asks, Do ethics and the law truly demand that we compel prisoners to live in a dying situation by refusing them an escape from a life worse than death?

HuffPost Live [discusses](#) the use of solitary confinement on people with mental illness with guests including Dr. Terry Kupers, psychiatrist and national expert on the mental health effects of solitary, and Ryan Pettigrew, who was held in solitary confinement for eight years at Colorado State Penitentiary.

The *Des Moines Register* [reports](#) that Iowa Governor Terry Branstad issued an order which he says will restrict the Iowa Juvenile Homes use of long-term isolation and restraints. Aside from holding the facility to higher standards of care, the order also calls for a task force to formulate new recommendations for the home.

NJ.com [reports](#) that PBA Local 105, New Jersey's corrections union, is pushing the term restricted engagement as a new way to describe solitary confinement. The request follows a recent petition calling for an end to the use of isolation at a youth detention facility in the state.

The New York World [reports](#) that previously unreleased data from New York City health officials shows that prisoners held in isolation remain in jail for decidedly longer than those held in general population. According to the story, prisoners with mental illness typically spend on twice as long incarcerated on Rikers Island than the general population, even if they committed similar crimes

ProPublica [reports](#) that, despite promising to help prisoners suffering from mental illness, New York continues to place many people in solitary confinement. According to the story, In New York, inmates diagnosed with serious disorders should be protected from solitary confinement. But since that policy began, the number of inmates diagnosed with such disorders has dropped.

The *Los Angeles Times* [reports](#) that advocacy groups have filed a federal lawsuit against Contra Costa County's youth detention facility claiming children with mental disabilities are being denied educational opportunities and are held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day.

The ACLU [outlines](#) 2013 legislative reforms that highlight a growing recognition of the need to limit solitary confinement in In The Solitary Confinement Scorecard.

In a recent [piece](#) published on *Truthout*, Lisa Guenther writes on the CDCR's response to the hunger strike and [gang validation](#) policies that have landed thousands of California prisoners in SHU. Referring to the hunger strike, Guenther writes, It is precisely this collective action, and this promise of solidarity, that is criminalized by the CDCR in its deployment of gang rhetoric against individual prisoners and against the strike action as a whole.

Courthouse News Service [reports](#) that a Pennsylvania county jail may be held liable for failing to treat a man who was being held in isolation. Derek Black, whose repeated requests for medical assistance over a 2-week period were ignored by jail officials, died after coughing up blood and suffering from chest pain for weeks in solitary.

Scientific American [reports](#) on the overuse of solitary confinement in the US, noting that isolating prisoners inflicts irreversible mental damage. Calling for the practice to be dramatically curbed, the story states that [s]olitary confinement is not only cruel, it is counterproductive.

Lisa Dawson served as an assistant editor, social media manager, and contributor at Solitary Watch. She continues to support prisoners and their family members who need help navigating re-entry. She is on Twitter [@endsolitary](#).

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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