

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | November 18, 2018

The *New York Daily News* [reported](#) that a state medical review board found that adequate medical treatment could have prevented 50 deaths in the custody of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision in the past five years. The boards report found in multiple instances, people with psychiatric disabilities committed suicide after being placed in solitary. 54-year-old Alfredo Lopez hanged himself at Great Meadow Correctional Facility in 2015 after staff continually placed him in solitary for his inability to produce urine for drug tests. While in solitary, Lopez was denied his nerve damage pain medication. In his suicide note, Lopez said, I cant take the abuse anymore. The mental anguish being locked up for urinalysis, while ALL along my system has been clean And combined with my nerve damage and the cold cell with which Im forced to be in 24 hours a day its as if I were dead already.

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) settled a 2015 lawsuit that claimed John Dorn, an HIV-positive man in MDOC custody, faced solitary confinement for engaging in consensual sex, though incarcerated people without HIV generally only face a 30-day loss of privileges. The MDOC agreed to change the policy that led to disproportionate punishment of HIV-positive people, re-evaluate the status of people placed in solitary, and pay Dorn \$150,000, [according](#) to *Metro Weekly*. Dorn said, While this outcome has taken many years to achieve, it was worth the fight. I lost over 21 months of my life to solitary confinement for no good reason because of the prior MDOC policy directive. No human being should have to endure that type of punishment.

The Nation published an [article](#) about the American Prisoner Writing Archive (APWA), a collection of over 1,600 essays written by incarcerated people covering topics such as assault and brutality by corrections officers, suicide, racism, solitary confinement, and lack of medical care. The APWA staff expressed their hope that the archive can ground national debate on mass incarceration in the lived experience of those who know prisons best.

NJ Advance Media [covered](#) the use of a padded timeout, seclusion room at Whitehall Elementary School in New Jersey. School administrators claim the room is used to protect special needs students from themselves when they exhibit behavioral issues, but Stephanie Reiss, the parent of an 8-year-old student with ADHD and autism, called it solitary confinement. While the superintendent says the school informs parents when their child is placed in the room, the boys father Scott Reiss said that he first found out about the room through his son, who likened the room to jail. Reiss said, I have no idea how many times they have been put in there and called for the school to develop a more appropriate method to calming down children with psychiatric disabilities.

Valerie Kiebala was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in The Root, Truthout, the Chicago Reporter, and Shadowproof.

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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