

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Lizzie Kane](#) | May 10, 2021

Ian Manuel was sentenced to life without parole for a crime committed at age 13, and spent nearly two decades in solitary confinement. Freed five years ago through the efforts of Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative, Manuel wrote about this experience in his new memoir, *My Time Will Come: A Memoir of Crime, Punishment, Hope, and Redemption*, which was [reviewed in the Los Angeles Times](#). Prison is a beast, but solitary confinement definitely did more damage to my soul than being in the general prison population would have, Manuel said. In solitary, you have to dive into your imagination, but to stay sane you also have to come up for air. For people for whom reality is too painful, they stay beneath the surface.

[According to an article in the Washington Post](#), Judge Colleen McMahon, former chief judge at the federal U.S. District Court in Manhattan, declared that New York's federal jails are run by morons and called the conditions in the jails inhuman. Her remarks came after a woman spent months in solitary confinement following her diagnosis with COVID-19 at the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC). The *Post* reported that according to court transcripts, McMahon castigated the Federal Bureau of Prisons, saying the agency's ineptitude and failure to do anything meaningful at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan and the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn amounted to the single thing in the five years that I was chief judge of this court that made me the craziest. MCC is the jail where Jeffrey Epstein died, and where [previous investigations](#) exposed abysmal conditions and extensive use of extreme solitary confinement.

A measure limiting the use of solitary confinement will be on the ballot in the May 18 primary election in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. [According to Pittsburgh's public radio station WESA](#), except during facility-wide lockdowns and when an incarcerated person poses a safety threat, the bill would prevent staff at the Allegheny County Jail from isolating individuals for more than 20 hours a day. A jail spokesperson claimed that solitary confinement is not currently used as a form of punishment, but this statement has been questioned by president and CEO of the Alliance for Police Accountability Bradin Fisher, a prominent advocate for the ballot initiative. Fisher said that individuals can be punished with isolation, and some have been sent to solitary after exhibiting symptoms of psychiatric disabilities.

[In a commentary for Filter](#), Mary Buser, author of *Lockdown on Rikers: Shocking Stories of Abuse and Injustice at New York's Notorious Jail* and former assistant chief of mental health on Rikers Island, writes about how corrections officers in New York have a choice to either keep resisting or get on board with the new HALT Solitary Confinement Act, which sharply limits the use of solitary. As an example of how corrections staff can become part of reform efforts, Buser recalls her visit to prisons in Colorado, which have largely eliminated the use of long-term solitary.

[According to The City](#), 1,200 corrections officers at Rikers Island called in sick on Sunday, with around 700 others on medically restricted duty for various health reasons. The move caused a serious staff shortage that led to a lockdown at the Anna M. Kross Center, a jail on Rikers that houses seriously mentally ill individuals among its 1,900 residents. The article also outlines how corrections officers are driven to the point of exhaustion, with many recently working triple and quadruple shifts.

In an [opinion piece for The Day](#), a newspaper in New London, Connecticut, Reverend Ann Perrott, a member of the Stop Solitary CT campaign, argues that solitary confinement needs to end, as it is a form of torture.

In a [commentary for the Prison Journalism Project](#), incarcerated writer Christopher Blackwell argues that being placed in isolation for medical quarantine is still solitary confinement for the people who experience it in prisons and jails. Solitary isn't the answer for behavioral issues, nor is it the answer for protecting prisoners from Covid-19, he writes. It's time our country puts an end to the use of solitary confinement, and strips DOC of this archaic practice of abuse.

[According to an article in The Conversation](#), more than 500,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities are incarcerated in US prisons. Many of these people end up in solitary confinement because they may have difficulty processing instructions and are considered unruly or obstinate.

An [investigation by NewsChannel 5 Nashville](#) shed light on how Tennessee's juvenile justice system could still keep youth in solitary confinement for days due to a loophole. [Following the report](#), the Lieutenant Governor took the lead to close the loophole, with the House and Senate passing a bill that prohibits juvenile facilities from using seclusion for punishment or administrative convenience, as well as preventing children from being in segregation for more than six hours in one day.

Lizzie Kane was an intern for Solitary Watch in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. Her work has also appeared in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Dallas Morning News, and Charlotte Observer.

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](#)

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by [Caitlin Konya](#)

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October 12, 2022

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