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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Aviva Stahl](#) | October 18, 2015

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

Taylor Pendergrass of the New York Civil Liberties Union wrote a commentary piece for [the Marshall Project](#) linking the movement to reform solitary confinement to the broader struggle to reduce mass incarceration. In every important respect, the search for a way out of solitary confinement mirrors the effort to reduce mass incarceration. While there is much low-hanging fruit, the ultimate success of both movements curbing the use of solitary and seriously reducing prison populations will come down to the same question: can we respond to [violence](#) differently?

[The Washington Post](#) covered what they termed the stunningly simple idea that could change solitary confinement as we know it putting blue rooms in supermax facilities and allowing those in solitary confinement to watch nature films.

The Supreme Court has [declined to hear a constitutional challenge](#) to solitary confinement after the individual who brought the petition, Alfredo Prieto, was put to death.

People incarcerated on Virginia's death row are now held in significantly less extreme conditions of isolation than several months ago, according to a [Guardian](#) article. The seven men on the unit now have contact visits with family, spend an hour a day with other death row prisoners and receive more recreation time; the prison is also building additional facilities for the men, including a TV room and a new exercise yard.

Pentagon officials are [evaluating two Colorado prisons](#) to ascertain whether either would be suitable for holding the remaining Guantanamo detainees, if and when they are transferred to US soil. The facilities under consideration include Florence ADX, the federal supermax facility, as well as Colorado State Penitentiary II, a maximum-security facility shuttered several years ago.

Fourteen human rights groups have called on the US Department of Justice to investigate conditions inside Florida's state prisons. According to [the Miami Herald](#), the group cited a list of suspected criminal and civil rights violations against prisoners, including: torture and death by starvation, excessive use of force, medical neglect, misuse of solitary confinement, suicide, sexual assault and death and torture by scalding.

New York City's Board of Corrections heard from health care providers, lawyers and formerly incarcerated individuals, who asked the Board not to adopt recently proposed changes to visitation and package rules at Rikers, as well as regulations guiding solitary confinement. According to [DNAinfo](#), the change would allow corrections staff to deprive inmates in solitary confinement of an otherwise required seven-day break after 30 days in the Bing. Such waivers could be issued three times in a row, amounting to a potential uninterrupted 120-day stay in solitary.

Last month, following a protest, detainees at the Stewart Detention Center in Georgia were locked up for 23 hours at a time and fed meals largely consisting of potatoes. I didn't get to participate in the protest, but I did get sent to the hole, said detainee Abel McCleesh Martinez in a [Huffington Post](#) interview. Everybody kind of went crazy. I got sent for not following instructions.

Individuals alleged of and convicted of terrorism offenses [are being denied access to reading materials](#), including Black Mass and other books about the mob. We keep people in solitary confinement for years in Brooklyn, down the street from Costco, said one defense lawyer whose client was held at a federal facility in the borough. This is New York City, not the Gulag.

The Joint Committee on the Judiciary in Massachusetts a state that some say have especially strict policies when it comes to long-term isolation [held a hearing on proposed reforms to solitary confinement](#). One advocate interviewed in the article, Leslie Walker, a lawyer and executive director of Prisoners Legal Services Massachusetts, said Prisoners are being held too long in segregation, and the conditions are too harsh.

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October 5, 2022

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