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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 [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 14, 2019

The *North Carolina Health News* [reported](#) that Mecklenburg County jail has opened its first psychiatric unit, as a voluntary therapeutic alternative to solitary confinement for people with mental illness. Sergeant Charles Pearson said, Some of them they cant function in another pod, they cant be around a lot of people, they cant follow orders. They end up in our segregation unit, and we dont want that. Instead, people who live on the unit have a daily schedule of classes, group therapy, and counseling, and are provided their medication. The program is modeled after the diversionary Behavioral Care Center in Tennessee. Sheriff Garry McFadden said, We want to be almost a community. For me, I think its what we shouldve been doing the whole time.

The *Detroit News* published an [article](#) on the new Woodland Center Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison in Michigan providing treatment for severely mentally ill incarcerated people. The treatment and programs at Woodland represent a shift toward the rehabilitative approach taken at Norways prisons. While conditions represent a significant improvement in the context of Michigans prisons, they still differ greatly from the open dorm-like setting in Norwegian prisons such as Halden, where incarcerated people can move freely. Therapy sessions at Woodland, for example, occur in a space where incarcerated persons are chained to a safety table or can be confined to a cage. The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) continues to isolate people, even some with severe mental illnesses, but their numbers have decreased by approximately 80 percent over the past decade, according to the Michigan Department of Corrections. Over 25 percent of the states 38,000 incarcerated people are being treated for mental health needs. The article is part of an ongoing *Detroit News* series called Healing Justice, begun after reporter Karen Bouffard traveled to Norway to witness its prison system.

The Freedom Forum Institute [reported](#) that Ty Evans, known as a jailhouse lawyer at Indiana State Prison (ISP), was placed in solitary confinement for 90 days and terminated from his job as a suicide companion, following the May 2019 publication of his writing in the Voices from Solitary series through Solitary Watch, entitled, [On Suicide Watch](#). A federal judge has ruled that Evans can proceed with his claim in *Evans vs. Buss* that the deputy warden of ISP violated his First Amendment rights in retaliating against him for his writing that criticized reportedly inhumane conditions of the suicide watch program.

Michael Cox, who spent six years in prison and is now the policy director of Bostons chapter of Black and Pinkan advocacy organization for LGBTQ incarcerated people, spoke to the Massachusetts Judiciary Committee last week about discrimination against LGBTQ people in prison. Cox said he spent 45 days in solitary confinement after reporting a sexual assault, [according](#) to WBUR public radio. This is both a deterrent to report future acts of violence against me and it has a chilling effect on all other queer people, he told the committee. Cox and other advocates claim that LGBTQ people are placed in solitary confinement far more frequently than non-queer people. The committee is currently considering bill 905, introduced by Senator Julian Cyr, which would require prisons to include information on the sexual orientation and gender identity of people held in solitary confinement.

The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* [reported](#) that the Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC) has released a new report claiming that the state has reduced the number of people held in long-term solitary confinement to 43, with 484 people in short-term restrictive housing. The VDOC report came in response to a General Assembly mandate for the data of people held in solitary confinement to be provided on October 1 every year. An ACLU of Virginia spokesman, Bill Farrar, however, said, Were pretty confident theres a lot more people in solitary confinement than what this report indicates. The ACLU has claimed that the VDOC vastly under-reports the number of people isolated across state prisons, which refuse to use the term solitary confinement, instead using segregation or restrictive housing. The ACLU filed a class action lawsuit this year against the use of solitary in the states two maximum-security prisons.

The Columbia University *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* published an [article](#) by Federica Coppola entitled The Brain in Solitude: An (other) Eighth Amendment Challenge to Solitary Confinement. The abstract notes, Growing neuroscientific research has emphasized that social interaction and environmental stimulation are of vital importance for physiological brain function. It has further highlighted that socio-environmental deprivation can have damaging effects on the brain, many of which may entail irreversible consequences. The author argues that these developments offer new avenues for challenging solitary confinement as cruel and unusual punishment.

The *Guardian* [reported](#) on what happened when a 27-year-old indigenous man named Rolando traveled from Guatemala to the United States seeking asylum after he had been shot in the head and targeted by police in his home country. Upon his arrival to the San Ysidro

port of entry, Rolando was detained and placed in solitary confinement. Staff at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Otay Mesa detention center in San Diego only provided him ibuprofen for his severe head wounds and denied him medical care while he was in isolation. I didn't even know what was night and what was day. I was sick already, but I was starting to get worse. Nobody was coming to see me, said Rolando, who reported experiencing loss of consciousness and bleeding from his eyes, ears, and nose, likely from brain hemorrhaging. Rolando was bailed out by the nonprofit legal firm Al Otro Lado and now awaits his asylum hearing.

KUOW [published](#) the story of Raul, an undocumented man who was detained at Northwest Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center in Tacoma, Washington in 2013. After engaging in a hunger strike to protest the conditions of the facility, staff placed him in solitary confinement for 20 or 30 days. Raul described the psychological effects he has experienced from his time in solitary. Not eating doesn't affect me as much as being alone. Anyone can stop eating one, two days. But not everyone can withstand being locked up alone, he said. The cell was the size of a parking space with white, brick walls and no windows. Recently released data revealed that 272 people were placed in solitary for an average of 51 days at the facility between 2013 and 2017.

Valerie Kiebal 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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John Jay Powers who spent 12 years in Solitary solitary confinement ADX, post videos every week, check him out here <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdeyr7zChECFuLYD0c5ZAPw>

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