

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2018/10/19/advocates-join-forces-to-end-long-term-solitary-confinement-in-u-s-prisons-in-the-next-10-years/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | October 19, 2018

*For the past two years, Solitary Watch has been meeting with other advocacy groups working to end solitary confinement, with the aim of coordinating a national campaign to support state and local organizing across the country. That campaign, [Unlock the Box](#), launched earlier this week.*

*During the past year, Solitary Watch has also been developing the [Solitary Confinement Resource Center](#), a curated, searchable database of information on solitary confinement. The SCRC was also launched this week in collaboration with the Unlock the Box campaign. In the future we will be working with the campaign to not only collect but develop essential advocacy tools and other new resources.*

*What follows is the press release for the launch of Unlock the Box and the Solitary Confinement Resource Center.*

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Washington, DC (October 17, 2018) A coalition of leading civil rights, human rights, and criminal and juvenile justice reform organizations today announced the official launch of Unlock the Box: The National Campaign to End Solitary Confinement on a conference call for media and advocates.

The new campaign will back a growing nationwide movement against solitary by providing funds, strategic and technical support, and other vital resources to state-based campaigns aiming to reduce or eliminate the use of long-term solitary in prisons, jails, and juvenile detention facilities. As one of its first joint projects, it today launched the Solitary Confinement Resource Center.

Unlock the Box was initiated in response to an overwhelming body of evidence showing that the isolation and sensory deprivation of solitary confinement have disastrous impacts on the mental and physical health of incarcerated people. The United Nations classifies prolonged solitary confinement as a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment that often rises to the level of torture, and in most Western democracies it is rarely used.

Yet U.S. prisons continue to utilize solitary as a routine management tool, and as a punishment for even minor prison rule violations. On any given day in the United States, some 80,000 men, women, and children are locked down in small cells without human contact, physical exercise, or rehabilitative programming. Many remain in solitary for months, years, or even decades. And some do not survive: Rates of suicide and self-harm among people held in solitary confinement far exceed those in the general prison population. Thousands of people each year are released directly from solitary, harming their chances at successful re-entry and reintegration into family and community life.

People in jail and prison have already lost their freedom. Subjecting them to solitary confinement adds unconscionable cruelty to their punishment, with terrible consequences for their lives, families, and communities, said Jessica Sandoval, Campaign Strategist for Unlock the Box. And it is all for no reason: Solitary doesn't correct behavior, nor does it make jails and prisons safer.

Unlock the Box brings together advocates from national organizations that have been working on the issue for close to a decade, including the ACLU National Prison Project, Center for Children's Law and Policy, National Religious Campaign Against Torture, and Solitary Watch. They are joined by leaders from two state-based groups with active campaigns to end solitary, the Correctional Association of New York and California Families Against Solitary Confinement.

Individually, these groups have worked to educate and influence the public, the press, policymakers, and corrections officials on the harms caused by solitary and the existence of humane and effective common-sense alternatives. In 2017, Colorado became the first state in the nation to adopt the UN's Mandela Rules for the treatment of prisoners, which call for a 15-day limit on solitary for most incarcerated persons, a complete ban for youth, and similar protections for people with mental illness and other vulnerable populations. Other states have made more modest reductions to their use of isolation by adopting incentives for positive behavior, improvements in mental health treatment and other rehabilitative programs, and the use of step-down programs to transition people out of solitary.

While momentum for change is growing, the need for resources is great. In order to meet this challenge, the organizations comprising Unlock the Box have joined forces to support and nurture both established and emerging state-level campaigns aimed at ending long-term solitary. Managing a campaign fund provided by the Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation and the Vital Projects Fund, Unlock the Box has already made grants to advocacy coalitions in nine states Connecticut, Louisiana, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Washington for projects ranging from data-collection to legislative campaigns to youth-focused initiatives.

In selecting states to support, Unlock the Box emphasizes campaigns that have developed targeted strategies and that sustain leadership by directly affected individuals both survivors of solitary confinement and family members of people in solitary. I was put in solitary confinement for the first time on Rikers Island when I was 16 years old, said Johnny Perez, Director of U.S. Prison Program for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. In all, I spent three years in solitary, and the experience still haunts me. People who have been personally impacted by solitary bring vital insight and value to the struggle to end this form of legalized torture, and Unlock the Box is committed to their involvement and empowerment.

Unlock the Box will also offer resources and hands-on assistance to state campaigns, based on the range of skills provided by its member organizations. The first of these ventures, made public today, is the Solitary Confinement Resource Center (SCRC), developed by Solitary Watch in collaboration with Unlock the Box. A curated, fully searchable database of media, research, court documents, firsthand accounts, and advocacy tools on solitary, the SCRC complements the Safe Alternatives to Segregation Resource Center, a practitioner-focused set of resources developed by the Vera Institute of Justice.

For a long time, solitary confinement was the biggest domestic human rights crisis that most Americans had never heard of, said Jean Casella, Co-Director of Solitary Watch. By putting the information in the SCRC at the fingertips of advocates, journalists, researchers, educators, attorneys, health care providers, corrections officials, solitary survivors and their loved ones, and other concerned citizens, we hope to shine a light on one of the darkest corners of our criminal justice system, and provide a real resource for change.

The Unlock the Box campaign believes that solitary confinement is the most extreme expression of the punishment paradigm that pervades the U.S. criminal justice system, and that ending solitary is a key component of ending mass incarceration. And this is precisely the right moment to undertake a coordinated national campaign, said David Fathi, Director of the National Prison Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). We believe that, state-by-state, we and our colleagues around the country can bring this issue to the tipping point. Together, we can make solitary a thing of the past and we must.

#### **Steering Committee Members:**

Jessica Sandoval, National Campaign Strategist, Unlock the Box Campaign

David Fathi, Director, National Prison Project, American Civil Liberties Union

Amy Fetting, Deputy Director, National Prison Project, ACLU, and Director, Stop Solitary Campaign

Dolores Canales, Organizer, California Families Against Solitary Confinement

Jenny Lutz, Staff Attorney, Center for Children's Law and Policy and Director, Stop Solitary for Kids Campaign

Mark Soler, Executive Director, Center for Children's Law and Policy

Johnny Perez, Director, U.S. Prison Program, National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Jack Beck, Director, Prison Visiting Program, Correctional Association of New York

Jean Casella, Co-Director, Solitary Watch

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James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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respect to all your work and being friends to people who have no friends  
very noble

We here at the IFF recommend closing the tyrannical, unconstitutional STATE BAR UNION SHOPS which violate the Taft Hartley Act as these Satanist, nihilists LIE, STEAL, & commit TREASON at will, violate the Common Law, as 96% of the prisoners in jail are there for victimless crimes

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

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