

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](#) | January 7, 2018

A federal lawsuit was filed on behalf of six women against Alameda County, the Alameda County Sheriffs office, and individual deputies for the alleged barbaric and inhumane treatment of pregnant women held at the Santa Rita Jail in California. [According](#) to the *East Bay Times*, the lawsuit claims that one woman was misdiagnosed with false contractions and ended up giving birth alone in solitary confinement, screaming in pain. Another plaintiff who was arrested for a probation violation when she was more than three months pregnant said that she was handcuffed behind her back against policy and had to sleep on the floor in a holding cell with eight to ten other women. She suffered a miscarriage after four days in Santa Rita. Currently 207 women are held at Santa Rita, five of whom are pregnant, including a woman 17 weeks pregnant with twins.

According to an inspection by the Center for Childrens Law and Policy, children held at seven detention centers operated by the Department of Juvenile Justice in Kentucky have punished children with solitary confinement without adequate monitoring, which led to the death of 16-year-old Gynnya McMillen two years ago. McMillens death was not discovered until 10 hours later, since staff did not monitor the cells. Since then, as the *Lexington Herald Leader* [reported](#), Justice and Public Safety Secretary John Tilley has begun instituting reforms in Kentuckys juvenile justice system, such as a reduction in the use of solitary confinement, well-being checks every 15 minutes, a psychologist on staff at each center, and stabilizing the workforce after the governor approved a twenty percent increase in pay for juvenile justice workers.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) announced the gradual closing of the juvenile detention centers Lincoln Hills School for Boys and Copper Lake School for Girls, a year after the DOC faced a class-action lawsuit for its use of solitary confinement and chemical restraints on the children. Larry Dupuis of the Wisconsin ACLU explained, While this is a step in the right direction, we will continue to pay attention to how young people are treated while they are moved from the current facilities. Though the logistics of transferring the children have yet to be resolved, Milwaukee organizer Jeffery Roman called for replacing the facilities with smaller, community-based programs near Wisconsins six most populous counties, [according](#) to the *Chronicle of Social Change*.

The *North Coast Journal of Politics, People and Art* [described](#) the experience of the Arts in Corrections program, particularly a creative writing class taught by author Cecelia Holland, at Pelican Bay State Prisons Security Housing Unit (SHU). Though students must remain locked in cages during the class, Holland focuses on teaching the men to express their voices through writing. Lt. John Silveira, a spokesperson for the prison, commended the program, I really see them having a little hope. I see them being in charge of their own brain again. It changes their demeanor, their interactions. I like it.

[According](#) to the *Houston Chronicle*, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) claimed that a hunger strike against conditions at the Allred Unit in North Texas ended on its tenth day with ongoing dialogue between prison administrators and hunger strikers. But Jennifer Erschabek of the Texas Inmate Families Association said that she has not heard anything to support that the strike had ended. While TDCJ ended the use of punitive solitary confinement earlier this year, it still employs administrative segregation, which has always been far more prevalent. As of July, 573 individuals were still held in solitary confinement at the Allred Unit. The hunger strike started with 45 individuals held in solitary confinement on Christmas Day, and on January 3, 37 individuals were still refusing meals.

MSNBC [interviewed](#) Deion Browder regarding his thoughts on the closing of Rikers Island prison, where his brother Kalief Browder was held for three years pre-trial as a teenager. He faced prolonged time in solitary confinement before he was released without charge. Scarred by his experience, he later committed suicide. Deion Browder discussed the significance of a widened perspective beyond the single institution of Rikers, emphasizing the need to fix all correctional institutions. Browder explained, I think we need to really dive deep into the information what happens inside these prisons. We need to dispatch more people into these prison systems and really analyze whats going on and what can we do to prevent this in the future.

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.

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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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