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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](#) | July 15, 2018

40-year-old Efran Romero de la Rosa died this week in an apparent suicide, while being held in solitary confinement at the Stewart Detention Center, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Georgia run by private prison company CoreCivic. De la Rosa, a man originally from Puebla, Mexico but living in Raleigh, North Carolina, suffered from bi-polar disorder, according to his brother. *Indy Week* [reported](#) that de la Rosa is the third person to die at the Stewart Detention Center since last May, including 27-year-old Jean Jimenez-Joseph, who had been denied mental health care before he committed suicide. ICE has begun an investigation into the death of de la Rosa, but the reason for his placement in solitary confinement has yet to be disclosed. De la Rosas death is the eighth to be reported nationwide in the custody of ICE this year.

The Intercept [spoke](#) with two-dozen immigrant women being held at the Port Isabel Service Processing Center in South Texas, where several women have gone on hunger strike to protest the conditions at the facility, including meager food portions, inability to contact their children, and censoring of immigration news. Women have reported being threatened with solitary confinement for participating in the rolling hunger strikes, while one woman was taken to solitary confinement after allegedly going crazy in the common area probably because she couldn't take the separation from her child anymore, according to another detained woman.

The upcoming sheriff of Mecklenburg County in North Carolina has called for an investigation into the high rate of deaths of people in the custody of the Mecklenburg County Jail, after a man died this week from a fractured skull after jumping from the second tier of the facility. Jerome Thompson was the fourth person to die in the custody of the jail in two months, an alarming rate, according to prisoner advocates. Another man, 32-year-old Kenneth Bigham, committed suicide in the solitary confinement unit at the facility in May, the *Charlotte Observer* [reported](#). Disability Rights North Carolina released a report last year revealing that almost half of the deaths in North Carolina jails were suicides, calling on jails to implement reforms, including an increase in mental health programs and an end to the use of solitary confinement.

Sheriff Ric Bradshaw of Palm Beach County, Florida recently released a statement defending the Palm Beach County Jails use of solitary confinement on juveniles, after the Legal Aid Society and the Human Rights Defense Center filed a lawsuit last month alleging abusive and neglectful treatment of youth at the facility. [According](#) to the *Palm Beach Post*, Bradshaw argued the necessity of placing the juveniles in segregation, but he failed to address the egregious allegations in the lawsuit, including the staff assault of one teen that resulted in his front teeth being knocked out. The lawsuit also claimed that one youth spent 16 consecutive weeks in solitary confinement and others claimed that they were placed in a frigid mental health cell when they expressed complaints about the conditions in solitary confinement. An attorney for the Legal Aid Society expressed, The children in PBSO [Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office] custody are subject to a systemic social isolation and deprivation of educational access. PBSO is using the charges against the children in an attempt to evade the drastic effects of solitary confinement.

CNN [reported](#) on recent allegations of human rights violations at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington, a privately run Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility. The company GEO Group, which operates the facility, currently faces two lawsuits in Washington over a forced labor program and claims of assault against individuals held in its custody. Immigrants held at Northwest Detention Center have organized several hunger strikes over the past four years, demanding better conditions, adequate food, and medical care. Two men, one of whom described solitary confinement as psychological torture, reported being placed in solitary after their participation in the hunger strikes. A 40-year-old mother, who had been separated from her daughter after seeking asylum, was also allegedly put in solitary for health reasons, though her medical tests were inconclusive and she showed no symptoms of disease. Since May, she has been deprived of communication with her daughter, except for one phone call for one minute, during which her lawyer said, Both of them were crying, so they didn't get a lot of words out.

The Southern Center for Human Rights (SCHR) published a [post](#) revealing severe conditions at the Special Management Unit (SMU) in the Georgia Diagnostic & Classification Prison (GDCP), one of the harshest and most draconian facilities that expert psychologist Craig Haney has ever seen in the country, as he wrote in a detailed [report](#) after his visit to the prison. Men in the SMU are held in solitary confinement for 22-24 hours a day in cells with solid metal doors without any personal property, typically for years at a time. SCHR and Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP filed a preliminary injunction against GDCP earlier this month, calling for more out-of-cell time,

increased activities for people in the SMU, and the transfer of mentally ill individuals out of the SMU. An attorney for the law firm expressed, The conditions at the SMU are beyond belief, beyond imagination. There is no valid penological justification for it, unless the Georgia Department of Corrections believes that inducing total despair and hopelessness and encouraging suicide is such a purpose.

Buffalo News published a [commentary](#) on the pre-trial detention of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and his placement in solitary confinement at a Virginia jail. Manafort's case has brought attention to a system that detains people, mostly low-income people because they can't afford the bail, before the court has determined them guilty or innocent. In Manafort's situation, his bail was revoked on the premise that he allegedly attempted to interfere with witnesses' testimonies. In many pre-trial detention scenarios, as is the case with Manafort as well, people are placed in solitary confinement without a hearing only on the orders of correctional staff, a practice that has been proven to psychologically damage people and affect their ability to present their defense in court.

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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