Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

https://solitarywatch.org/2021/10/14/seven-days-in-solitary-10-13-21/

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by Roxanne Barnes | October 14, 2021

A Kaiser Health News report co-published with NPR details the trauma that survivors of solitary confinement carry with them years after their imprisonment. Pamela Winn, founder of nonprofit RestoreHER, which fights against mass-incarceration, describes her lasting mental health effects from spending eight months in solitary confinement. Her time in solitary continues to make it difficult for her to be around other people and has heightened her paranoia, despite the fact that she has been out of incarceration for the past ten years. The report elaborates on the myriad studies that demonstrate how solitary confinement causes heart damage, depression, heightened suicides, and a sense of fear around other people. Craig Haney, social psychology professor at the University of California Santa Cruz and an expert on the psychological effects of solitary, notes that for people who have spent time in solitary confinement, other people can become a source of anxiety rather than support.

In an op-ed for the Seattle Times, Chris Blackwell and Rachael Seevers (an incarcerated writer and an attorney) explain how the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC)s announced end to disciplinary confinement actually accounts for only a fraction of the people in solitary confinement and leaves hundreds in conditions that the international community has deemed torture. They report that the DOC is unwilling to put limits on other forms of solitary confinement still in use. In August, when the Office of the Corrections Ombuds found people being held in administrative segregation for over 100 days, the DOC refused a recommended cap of 30 days. Blackwell and Seevers enumerate the different forms of solitary that are still in practice in Washington, noting that 157 people have been held in maximum security for at least the past 500 days, and some for a decade. They insist that to truly employ evidence-based practices, the DOC should abolish long-term solitary confinement entirely.

After a COVID-19 outbreak in Maines Cumberland County Jail, the whole 300-person population has been held in lockdown for 23 hours a day since mid-September, the Sun Journal reports. People inside report mental health is at a crisis point; there has been a noticeable increase in the code-white intercom call that indicates a suicide attempt, and many people require mood stabilizing medication for the first time. Everyone in the jail was given a tablet at the beginning of the pandemic, but families report that even basic entertainment or sending emails rack up exorbitant fees. Correctional officers use COVID-19 safety and staff absenteeism as justification for isolating the entire facility, which is, as Emma Bond of the ACLU of Maine says, not a reason to impinge on peoples constitutional rights with this inhumane practice.

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety released a report finding that people with mental health disorders fare better when placed in therapeutic housing than when placed in solitary confinement, reports North Carolina Public Radio. According to the Department of Justice, 37 percent of people in prison have a history of mental health problems. Idaho State University professor of clinical psychology Shannon Lynch explains that there has been a pretty high reliance not in all corrections facilities but in many corrections facilities on using solitary confinement, or restrictive settings to manage a lot of different behavioral problems. This North Carolina report determined that when placed in a Therapeutic Diversion Unit, people were less likely to commit infractions, require in-patient mental health treatment, and attempt suicide.

Leavenworth Detention Center, a privately run pre-trial detention center in Kansas, has held people inside in solitary confinement since February, following two suicides and ten severe beatings and stabbings, reports the Kansas Reflector. The facility is run by the company CoreCivic. It holds 900 individuals, and the facility says it is severely understaffed, with 25 percent staff vacancy on average. As a result, COVID-19 has run rampant through the facility, family and attorney visits are still on hold, and people inside are stacked three to a room. Until August, those requiring medical treatment were only permitted access to healthcare in emergencies. During a September sentencing hearing, a US District Judge said, The only way I could describe it frankly, whats going on at CoreCivic right now is its an absolute hell hole.

Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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

Solitary Watch encouragescomments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Commentsthat violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about rights and permissions.

Solitary Watch News