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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](#) | December 31, 2017

KAUZ Channel 6 [reported](#) that 48 individuals held in solitary confinement at the James Allred Unit in Iowa Park, Texas, have begun refusing meals in a hunger strike against conditions at the prison. According to the wife of an individual held at Allred, the hunger strikers feel their rights are being violated.

Five immigrants held at Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, California, have filed a federal civil lawsuit against the contracted private prison company CoreCivic, alleging the facility forces individuals to work for at most \$1.50 per day, in violation of human trafficking laws and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention standards. [According](#) to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the complaint alleges that staff threatens people who do not work with solitary confinement and deprivation of visitation rights. The immigrants named in the complaint are all asylum seekers and have pending cases.

The *Record Journal* [reported](#) that a new law passed last year, effective January 1, will prohibit Connecticut's Department of Corrections from using solitary confinement for individuals under the age of 18. The law will also require the DOC commissioner to review the use of solitary confinement; mandate annual reports on the use of restrictive housing and administrative segregation; and provide additional training and promote wellness for correctional staff. The Executive Director of the ACLU of Connecticut said the bill takes an important step toward justice.

[According](#) to *In Justice Today*, King County (Seattle), Washington, has passed a bill prohibiting solitary confinement for youth held in adult correctional facilities, 86 percent of whom were black in 2016 and many of whom are pretrial detainees. Solitary confinement has already been eliminated from King County's juvenile detention center. One of the bill's cosponsors, Jeanne Kohl-Welles, said, "It is my hope that this legislation marks a significant shift in the way we think about and administer justice, especially for minors, at King County. It is our responsibility to make sure all young people in detention have the access and opportunity they need to reach their full potential."

Honolulu Civil Beat [discussed](#) the mental health effects of solitary confinement, in anticipation of the House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 85 Task Force, which will release an evaluation report on Hawaii's prison system next week. The article linked solitary confinement with mental health symptoms, such as suicidality, self-harm, paranoia, panic attacks, hallucination and social atrophy. It highlighted the story of 30-year-old Jessica Forston, who had a history of seizures and mental illness before committing suicide in her solitary confinement cell at the Women's Community Correctional Center in Kailua last summer. The HCR Task Force faces pressure to privatize the state prison on Oahu, though it previously expressed interest in transforming state correctional facilities to utilize a more rehabilitative approach.

ProPublica [published](#) the story of Tyler Haire, a boy with a list of severe mental illnesses who ended up in Calhoun County Jail in Mississippi at the age of 16 after stabbing his father's girlfriend. Haire waited in jail for three and a half years for his mental evaluation from the understaffed and underfunded state mental hospital. Spending much of his time in solitary confinement, allegedly for his own protection, Haire would throw tantrums or talk about his visions of aliens and the voices he heard in his head. Though the county sheriff said that his need for mental health treatment was evident to anyone, Haire was deemed competent to stand trial, pled guilty, and received seven years in the state prison. The senior judge in Calhoun County said he's haunted by cases like Tylers. Of course, I worry that this is what I'm participating in the warehousing of the mentally ill.

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.

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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