

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Aviva Stahl](#) | April 9, 2017

The [NPR show Hidden Brain](#) interviewed UC Irvine criminology professor Keramet Reiter about what happens to the mind in isolation. Reiter says inmates living in isolation crave things we might take for granted, such as the touch of another person or the sight of the moon. They often find it hard to differentiate one day from the next, because the lights are always on in their cells. Tracking weeks, months, or even years often becomes difficult.

The mother of a 17-year-old who killed himself while in solitary confinement testified about the impact of New York's legal age of criminal responsibility. At a hearing to [Raise the Age](#) and eliminate the state's requirement that 16 and 17 year-olds be automatically tried as adults Alicia Barraza described what happened to her child once he was tried as an adult, sent to an adult facility, and placed in isolation. The measure to Raise the Age subsequently passed.

Solitary Watch's James Ridgeway and Katie Rose Quandt penned an investigative piece in the [Village Voice](#) about Adam Hall, who has had time continually added to his New York prison sentence for suicide attempts and the inability to follow rules. According to a veteran former New York State corrections officer, Hall's story, though heartbreaking, is common, they wrote. People with serious mental illnesses often accrue small felony charges in prison, extending their sentences bit by bit and ultimately spending most of their lives locked away in solitary confinement.

The New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association has said that changes in the state's policy with regards to solitary confinement are putting prison staff in danger. In 2015, New York reached a settlement with the New York Civil Liberties Union about the use of disciplinary segregation in state facilities. It's basically given the inmate population a more brazen attitude, recognizing that consequences aren't what they used to be, union head Mike Powers [told NPR](#). A representative for the New York prison system said violence against guards actually fell in 2016.

The governor of New Mexico has [vetoed legislation](#) that would have reduced the use of isolation in the state for children and people with mental illness. The bill oversimplifies and misconstrues isolated confinement in such a way so as to eliminate flexibility and endanger the lives of inmates and staff alike, Governor Susana Martinez wrote in her veto message.

A Connecticut bill to reduce the use of solitary has [passed through the state's Judiciary Committee](#), and now goes for a vote in its House of Representatives. Meanwhile, the [Senate Judiciary Committee in Nevada](#) is also hearing testimony on a bill to limit the use of solitary confinement in the state's prisons and juvenile detention centers.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. She's written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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