

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/06/16/solitary-confinement-widely-used-in-californias-juvenile-jails/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | June 16, 2011

Based on findings by the state's court-appointed overseers, [California Watch reports](#) that Juvenile inmates at California correctional facilities have been held in isolation nearly 24 hours straight on hundreds of occasions this year, in violation of state regulations.

An audit by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in March [found multiple facilities](#) operated by the Division of Juvenile Justice kept youth prisoners deemed a threat in their cells for all but 40 minutes a day. Auditors found Ventura Youth Correctional Facility, about 50 miles northwest of Los Angeles, to be the worst offender.

The juveniles placed on temporary detention or temporary intervention plans can be placed in solitary confinement for 21 hours a day.

Youth facilities exceeded that limit 249 times from January through April, according to numbers provided to Nancy Campbell, who is appointed by the state courts to oversee the juvenile facilities. Campbell [confirmed the findings \[PDF\]](#) in a letter to the Prison Law Office last month. Campbell wrote:

Documentation shows that the most frequent failure to meet out-of-room requirements has occurred at Ventura Youth Correctional Facility. In the 14 weeks documented, there were 173 out of 1,453 incidents during which youth on TD [temporary detention] or TIP [temporary intervention plans] spent more than 21 of 24 hours confined to his or her rooms. Other DJJ facilities struggle to meet mandated services requirements as well: OH Close Youth Correctional Facility (43 out of 588 incidents); Preston Youth Correctional Facility (15 of 245 incidents); Southern Youth Correctional Reception Center and Clinic (10 of 198 incidents); and NA Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility (8 of 761 incidents).

The Prison Law Office has responded to the violations with a new motion in the lawsuit *Farrell v. Cate*, which the state settled with an agreement to reform mental health care at youth facilities in 2004. The filing seeks to force the juvenile justice division to comply with the 21-hour isolation limit.

Those findings are consistent with what experts have been saying month after month, year after year, and the problem has not been solved, Sara Norman, managing attorney at the Prison Law Office, [told The Bay Citizen](#). These are the problems that are hurting the youth the most, and we are out of patience.

Keep in mind that California's regulations actually *permit* juvenile prisoners to be isolated 21 out of 24 hours, yet the state's facilities cannot manage to get teens out of their cells or rooms for even three hours a day. This despite the fact that [a 2000 report](#) by California's Inspector General found that keeping juveniles in prolonged isolation can have a profound impact on their well-being. The problem, according to the audit, reflects the crisis in California's adult prisons, as recently [addressed by the Supreme Court](#): there are simply too many kids in juvie, with too few staff and resources to deal with them humanely.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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.

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