

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | March 30, 2012

Five years ago, the *Boston Globe* did a [comprehensive exposé](#) on what it called the Prison Suicide Crisis in Massachusetts. The *Globe* found that prisoners in the state were taking their own lives at a rate three times the national average and that most of the deaths came after careless errors and deadly decisions by Department of Correction officials and health staff, at times when inmates were obviously at risk. The state hired a suicide prevention specialist but apparently ignored most of the recommendation in the specialists report, including warnings against placing suicidal inmates in solitary confinement.

Unsurprisingly, as the [Boston Globe reported](#) in 2010, the epidemic of prison suicides continued. And earlier this month, two suicides took place in a single weekend, both of them in isolation cells suggesting that little has changed in Massachusetts prisons.

On March 10, the [Globe reported](#) that a prisoner awaiting trial on murder charges had been found dead in his cell: Eric J. Snow, 30, of Bridgewater, was found lying in his bed at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility with a plastic bag over his head, said a spokeswoman for [the] Plymouth County District Attorney. Snow's former attorney, Gerald Fitzgerald, called the conditions of his clients pre-trial detention a shameful disgrace. He told the *Globe*: We live in a society that treats animals in a zoo more decently and more humanely than they treat men in prison awaiting trial. They broke him. Why, against their own policies, is this man in isolation for four years?

Previous to his death, the [Globe later reported](#), Snow pleaded with Plymouth jail officials to free him from more than four years in the hole. On February 27, Snow had written to the jails security director: All I want is to please be able to live in regular population where I'm not confined to a cell for five days a week losing my mind. I have been in the hole for so long it is eating me alive.

On the same weekend that Snow killed himself, another inmate committed suicide in solitary in Massachusetts, this time at the state prison in Shirley. As the [Globe reported](#) it: A correctional officer at the medium-security prison at MCI-Shirley found Scott Rose hanging in a single cell [from] a bed sheet at about 8:15 p.m. on Saturday, according to Diane Wiffin, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Correction. Wiffin told the paper that correctional officers check the inmates in the unit every 30 minutes. Also, they are regularly screened for mental health issues and are allowed to have family visitors, among other privileges, she said.

Wiffin had [earlier told the Globe](#) that in fact, Massachusetts state prisons do not use solitary confinement, although it does place prisoners in 23-hour-a-day isolation, often for long periods of time. It's not solitary confinement, she said, because, under the regulations, the inmates are allowed one hour of exercise per day outside their cells, unless security or safety considerations dictate otherwise.

Following the report of Rose's suicide, Timothy Muise, whom we have [written about before](#) and who now is incarcerated at Shirley, sent a letter to the Editor of the *Globe* saying Wiffin wasn't telling the whole story. He accused the Massachusetts Department of Corrections of providing a sanitized version of how Rose had died. An excerpt from his letter which was not published in the paper follows:

Scott Rose committed suicide because investigative officers [names delete], ordered the psychiatrist here, to take Scott off his psychiatric medication due to their concerns that he may be misusing it. It is illegal for security staff to do this, but it is quite commonplace, and the psychiatric staff are extremely reluctant to stand up to security staff as they will become the target of their ire. These are facts. Sad, but the truth.

Further, you reported that Ms. Wiffin told you that guards make rounds in the Special Management Unit (The Hole) every thirty (30) minutes. Trust me when I tell you, as I have been in quite a few holes, that the guards do not do this. They may keep records that they do, but they don't, and what is even more troubling is that after the suicide crisis of 2010 the DOC agreed that they would do rounds every fifteen (15) minutes in the hole. Did Ms. Wiffin forget this?

In 2010 I met with Undersecretary for Criminal Justice Sandra McCroom and then Commissioner Harold Clarke about the suicide crisis. I, along with some other prisoners, detailed for them the truths about this debacle, but nonetheless we continue to see men choose death over another day behind bars in the draconian Massachusetts prison system. The cost is high.

I would ask that you try to tell the real story here, not just for the sake of prisoner lives, but for the safety of the public.

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.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments 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. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

Some of us DO give a s__t. Not only must we fight against the biggest gang: the DOC, but we have to contend with middle class advocacy organizations who know little but want us to remain quiet because they receive grant \$\$\$\$. What is more criminal than the DOC are the helper organizations like the Prisoner Legal Services who lobby the Boston Globe to editorialize for horrific Behavior Modification Units as an alternative to solitary confinement!!!!

search for our quarterly newsletter Mass Prison Voice or google our old website <http://www.massdecarcerate.org> Good luck to you.

The Prisons and the public think, The more you take away and the more prison sucks That's what will keep people from wanting to come back. How does this make sense? It just pisses people off. Makes them miserable and violent to everyone around them. They've taken everything. Look at Middleton jail for instance. \$30, just to walk into the building and then To see a doctor, haircut, and medication. If you didn't Pay that bid, you better be sure their going to take it from you next time you come back.. You have men going in with no underwear, T-shirts, Socks, Or even Shower shoes. That's Incredible! That Money comes from the familys. Who are treated like criminals themselves and the guards harassing the girlfriends. It's a wonder why a lot of those inmates get out with nobody. There entire existence is sabotaged.. Insane Hikes in Phone calls, Its easy to say if you dont like it then dont go to jail, but, everybody knows Shit happens.. Its not a revolving door for everybody, and sometimes people get desperate too. They've taking all hope from everybody. You people want a good look into Government corruption? Into, How the American people are no longer free and the How the Government can do what they want A good look is the prison system.. You go against any of their will.. They'll just make you Disappear into the abyss of High Tech Cages they design every year. Take a Good look at that ADX Federal prison in Colorado That prison is specially designed for Solitary confinement. Look that prison up The men in that PLACE are in hell. They petition the courts and their ignored. Kill the damn people for God sakes. How is that rehabilitation? Its all bullshit. Where being screwed and it our own damn faults because we let them do it to us Look at our rents alone??? We cant even stand up for ourselves. The overall truth is nowadays; NO ONE GIVES A SHIT ABOUT ANYBODY.

I was in MCI Shirley when in July, 2009 when my friend Pat OBrian hanged himself in his cell. He had the window of his celldoor covered and his door pegged, and the cop doing rounds chose to ignore it and let Pat be, thinking he was just being cool and not bothering him. Pat had been dead for a couple hours by the time we found him, i held his legs while another friend cut him down

So very sorry Southend. MA DOC Is a criminal enterprise.

Also, we believe many of these desath are actually assisted suicides. How did Tony, a paraplegic, hang himself from a the shower cubicle (2006) when he could not even get inside it? <http://www.wrongfuldeathinstitute.com/links/suicide.htm>
PRISON DEATH BY SUICIDE NOT SO FAST
<http://www.wrongfuldeathinstitute.com>

so help me god if i find out that someone told eric to end his own life or helped him do it. eric was is and always will be my world as i know it. yes eric had mental health issues but that never once made him unlovable. big deal he had issues i mean who the hell doesnt have issues. eric comes from a wonderful family and has so many people that love him and care about him so i know he never would have just woke up one morning and said to himself ya i think ill end my life. none of this makes any sense to me at all because the D.A doesnt even have enough evidence to convict him on these bullshit charges to begin with and he knew that very well and with his trial starting in may he would have been home within the month. eric would have been sitting at my kitchen table bitching at me for drinking

to much coffee and yelling at me to quit smoking cigarettes or complaining that im to thin while he stuffed his face with everything he could find in the fridge so thats why i say that none of this makes any sense to me at all. eric has always been an emotional fighter seeing as he has never once backed down from a charge and he never made any trouble for other inmates or prison workers, its not like eric to even think about taking his own life never mind actually going threw with it. im starting to wonder if a prison guard was paid to slip a plastic bag over erics head while he was sleeping seeing as eric was a very deep sleeper he could have easily slept threw that plus his medications made him very tired which also explains why he would have slept threw it as well. even erics lawyer feels that the prison played a huge roll in his clients death. I believe that the prison broke eric emotionally and then either slipped a bag over erics head while he slept or that the prison guards talked eric into end his own life because this is not somthing he ever would have done, not even if eric had gone off his medication wold he have killed himself. foul play must have been involved somehow and someone somewhere is covering it up.

I have known eric snow for most of my life. eric always did his time well and did not cause a problem among other inmates or guards/staff. eric had every right to be in population and even requested for that. never once in all the years that i have known eric has he ever once mentioned taking his own life. eric has always been against anyone killing themselves and i honestly believe erics lawyer. that prison broke him. people always tend to believe what they read rather than taking the time to get to know someone before they pass judgment. i spent nearly 20 yrs of my life knowing eric and i gotta tell ya that while most of you will never believe it. eric was such a sweetheart with a heart of gold and he always treated his friends and family so very well. the world is full of small minded idiots that make the choice to believe fiction over facts because its easier for them but in erics case, he was different and far from the monster that the press wants you to believe he was. you guys can remember eric anyway you want to but im making the choice to remember him for who he was. the man who sat around wearing grateful dead shirts listening to crappy music and pigging out on pasta salad or even the guy with the baggy pants who would play hacky sack for hours on end, the guy that never once forgot my birthday or christmas and the guy that always told me how beautiful i looked even when i was broken out with pimples at the time, the guy that held me for hours while i cried when my dog had to be put to sleep and then offered to buy me a new dog to replace my loss. the guy that would pass me notes in class with funny faces drawn on them and the way he would light when i would walk into the room even if it was just the visiting room. I dont care what anyone thinks about him because i love him, i believe him and i believe in him just as i always have and much like i always will. eric sweetheart i love you and miss you and until we meet again someday just remember you better be saving my seat!!!!

My boy is a DMH client and is in the hole right now. He almost succeeded suicide in the hole two years ago. If he get reclassified , he will stay in there for 4-6 months. He wont make it and no one seems to care. I dont know what to do.

When a prisoner is suicidal they are able to articulate that and do. The fact is when they do ask for help, correction officers tell them to do it. That is the case in both state and county. This is one of the reasons for the high suicide rate in this state.

Thank you! Yes it is very common for guards to encourage prisoners to commit suicide. And the mental health workers are often not much better. But feeling suicidal is not always a sickness; it is a response to the horrific conditions and despair inflicted by the DOC. The prisoner is seen as weak, therefore, sadly, many helper groups see the solution as creating more maximum security mental health units. They invert cause and effect and end up serving the DOC. And then of course many cases are assisted suicide.

March 30, 2012 Dear Jim,

Thank you for writing about the most recent suicide at MCI-Shirley MA and for printing what Shirley prisoner Tim Muise wrote. (I was contacted Sunday March 11 about the death of Scott Rose. I sent out the message below which includes the Globe reporter David Adams whod written about the suicide of Eric Snow in county lock up a few days earlier.) The Globe ignored Tim Muise, preferring instead to speak with prison legal advocate Leslie Walker who functions as the Globes go to girl. (You might ask Tim Muise how he and other activist prisoners are treated by Prison Legal Services Ms. Walker. I would love to share with you how I, the sister of a profoundly disabled prisoner, have been treated by Ms. Walker as well.)

Not only do the DOC, Prison Legal Services and the Boston Globe COLLABORATE to frame and spin conditions of confinement and deaths behind bars, they work together to institute maximum security mental health units in every MA prison. Such was the case with the December 2007 Globe investigative series about MA prison suicides, to which you refer in todays post.

PLS Director Walker believes that Residential Treatment Units are the answer to suicides. Indeed a recent court decision applauded the collaboration between the DOC and the Disability Law Center (working closely for several years with PLS) to run two behavior management/modification units. That legalized torture. As we have repeated ad nauseum: Any legislation, lawsuit or advocacy work which requires that abused prisoners be helped to heal by the very entity that torments them is no help at all. It is betrayal and collusion with state-sanctioned violence.

Its not just the Massachusetts Department of Correction that tightly controls its prisoners: Prisoner Legal Services and the Boston Globe work in synergy with it. It is a monstrous betrayal. All are complicit in the abuse of prisoners and their loved ones.

Susan Mortimer

P.S. I am sending you the list of well over 100 people to whom I sent the March 12 message (below). On it are several lawmakers, city councilors, reporters and prison reformers. Not a single official or reporter responded. However many mothers, daughters, husbands, fathers of prisoners did. These are the very people ignored, dismissed or trivialized by the Prison Industry and their lapdogs.

Its not right to want to heal the suffering of people without committing to fight the very causes of this suffering.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

(Monday March 12 from SusanMMortimer@hotmail.com:

Please be aware that there has been another death at MCI-Shirley. We understand that Scott Rose, a lifer, died in the Hole. Scott was approximately 40 years old. Prisoners heard a commotion yesterday and then heard code being called. The unconfirmed cause is suicide.

Those of us who know the DOCs culture view this with caution & skepticism. Why and for how long was Scott in the Hole? Was this another of many assisted suicides/murder by guards? If the cause truly was suicide, why why and how did it happen in solitary confinement?

Does anyone know Scotts family? PLEASE let us know. If so, they may be able to secure some immediate forensic assistance before the DOCs Liars for Hire spin this death to their own benefit. As you may be aware, the Chief Medical Examiners Office is, like the Department of Correction, under the Executive Office of Safety and Security. That office is responsible for performing an autopsy. Aside from the abysmal reputation of the the CMEs office, it has a built-in bias.

Scott is still listed as in the DOCs custody- but at its headquarters on Maple Street in Milford, not at Shirley Medium. Dont let them white-wash another death in custody.

RIP Scott. Our hearts go out to you and your family.

Please forward

Susan Mortimer, Arlington, MA sister of disabled SBCC prisoner and friend to many loved ones who've experienced loss at the hands of the DOC.)

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