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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](#) | July 22, 2019

Reuters (along with many other media outlets) [reported](#) that Joaquin El Chapo Guzmán was sent to the U.S. Penitentiary Administrative Maximum, or ADX, in Florence, Colorado, on Friday, after being sentenced to life in prison plus 30 years on drug trafficking and murder conspiracy charges. Guzmán said that the conditions he had faced at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, a federal jail in lower Manhattan, were torture because he was kept in solitary confinement and denied access to sunlight and clean water, as well as any contact with his family. At ADX, Guzmán will still be confined for around 23 hours a day to a solitary cell that has a narrow window about 42 inches (107 cm) high and angled upward so only the sky is visible. The President of Mexico Andrés Manuel López Obrador called Guzmán's life sentence and prison conditions inhumane.

The *Press-Enterprise* [reported](#) that four women held in the administrative segregation unit (ad-seg) at the Riverside County jail in California engaged in a hunger strike for sixteen days, demanding protection against sexual harassment from staff, more out-of-cell time, and adequate care. The ad-seg unit houses women in solitary confinement for all but 30 minutes a day, and the women claim that the men housed in ad-seg at the jail now get 90 minutes a day out of their cells after they protested in January. A sheriff's deputy confirmed that state law requires only 30 minutes out-of-cell time, but he claimed a new policy implemented in March increased the minimum to an hour per day. However, attorney Sara Norman with the Prison Law Office, said, Thirty or even 90 minutes a day is not acceptable from our perspective. We don't think it complies with basic human needs. The hunger strike ended last Monday after staff agreed to negotiations on some of the women's demands.

On KSQD radio, the program Non-violent Voices [interviewed](#) Willow Katz, grassroots activist and member of California Families Against Solitary Confinement, End Solitary Santa Cruz County, Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition, and Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement. The segment discusses progress in the movement to end solitary confinement, since the 2011 California hunger strikes. Katz spoke about people being isolated based on confidential information about gang associations, obtained through the unreliable process of debriefing other incarcerated people. Individuals ended up isolated for having ethnic or political artwork, books, or tattoos, and Latinos were over-represented in solitary in California. While about 1,500 people were released from solitary under the *Ashker v. Governor of California* settlement, Katz says that many people continue to be held in solitary across the state and confidential information is still used as a reason to isolate people.

NJ.com published an [op-ed](#) written by Stephan Whitley, a man formerly incarcerated in New Jersey, thanking Governor Phil Murphy for passing the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act. Whitley graduated from Rutgers University last month, but he says the time he spent in solitary confinement in New Jersey prisons had a lasting impact on him. Whitley says he was put in administrative segregation, or solitary confinement, for having a cell phone. He describes the constant yelling, stench of urine and feces, the mice infestation, the sweltering heat during the summer, and the humiliating strip search process to leave his solitary cell. Sometimes, Whitley writes, after officers would ask me to lift my genitals, they would order me to start over again and open my mouth, because they wanted me to put my fingers in my mouth after having touched my genitals. It was either that or sit in the room alone and risk going crazy.

[According](#) to *The Frontier*, Lawton Correctional Facility in Oklahoma, operated by private prison contractor GEO Group, has responded to gang violence with extended, facility-wide lockdowns. Last year, the entire prison faced conditions of solitary confinement for a total of 75 days, in addition to the people held in the supermax unit or protective custody units, who already may be locked down 23 hours a day, according to former director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) Joe Allbaugh. A former officer at Lawton said an extended lockdown breaks them down because you are not allowed to talk to your loved ones and you're in this small cell with your cellie. I can see a lot of them wanting to take their lives. During a recent 33-day lockdown, one man cut his throat and wrist, another attempted to hang himself, and several others either engaged in self-harm or became violent with their cellmates.

KULR [reported](#) that the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court's dismissal of a civil rights complaint filed by Disability Rights Montana, claiming that people with serious mental illness held at Montana State Prison spent weeks and months at a time in solitary confinement without treatment. In its decision, the court panel concluded that the conditions at Montana State Prison put people with serious mental illness at substantial risk of serious harm, and that the Montana Department of Corrections had been indifferent to that risk. The complaint called for the prison to ban the use of solitary confinement for people with serious mental illness, and to bring

the facility's mental health care into compliance with the Constitution.

NPR [published](#) a story on lax oversight of immigration detention facilities, and included the story of Osny Kidd, who arrived in the United States from Honduras with his mother when he was nine years old. While he had been protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, he was later arrested and taken to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Adelanto Detention Facility, operated by the GEO Group in California. Kidd recalled the physical harassment, inhumane conditions at the facility, and said he was sent to a solitary confinement room, called Bravo. In Bravo, he said, there was nobody watching in there. You'd see people come out of there with bruises. Kidd said his grievances were all ignored. The private company Nakamoto, hired by ICE to inspect facility conditions, has come under fire for its lack of transparency and failure to properly enforce ICE policy. ICE has not revealed whether it will renew Nakamoto's contract in September.

The MacArthur Justice Center [published](#) a post on its blog regarding the case that Solitary Watch [covered last week](#). The attorney in the case, Maggie Filler, writes about the ordeal of Takeisha Brown, whose son Tyquine Lee was diagnosed with serious mental illness when he was eight years old and landed in prison in Virginia ten years later, where he was subjected to 600 days of solitary confinement despite his psychiatric disability. Brown describes speaking with her son over the phone and visited him at Red Onion State Prison, where she found that his mental state had deteriorated so severely that he was nonsensical, often speaking in long strings of numbers and unable to recognize her voice, and one time, he barked like a dog.

Valerie Kiebal 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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