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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | June 3, 2019

[According](#) to NPR, the family of Terrill Thomas, a 38-year-old man who died of dehydration in April 2016 in the Milwaukee County Jail, will receive \$6.75 million in a settlement with the county and Armor Correctional Health Services, the company operating the jails health care at the time. The lawsuit says, They forced him to spend the last week of his life locked in an isolation cell 24 hours a day, with no drinking water, no edible food, no working toilet, no mattress, no blanket, no shower access, no means of cleaning his cell, no ability to communicate with his family, no relief from constant lockdown, and no meaningful access to urgently needed medical or mental health care. Despite Thomass struggle with bipolar disorder, staff turned off his water as punishment for six days until Thomas died. Claims held in the lawsuit against former Sheriff David Clark that he knowingly sanctioned Thomass water to be cut off will be dismissed as a part of the settlement, [according](#) to the *Huffington Post*.

The *Peoples World* [reported](#) that the Oakland City Council passed a resolution for a collaborative audit process of the Alameda County Sheriffs Office. Councilmember Nikki Fortunato Bas said that 35 people have died in the custody of the countys jail in the past five years and demanded financial transparency for the rapidly growing budget of the sheriffs office. Oakland and Santa Rita jails have faced allegations of inadequate medical care, imposing sleep deprivation, forced abortions, lack of feminine hygiene products, and excessive use of solitary confinement. Barbara Doss, the mother of Dajuan Armstrong, spoke at a rally outside of the council meeting about her sons death last year at the Santa Rita county jail when he was 23 years old. Doss says she still has not been provided answers about the circumstances of her sons death.

The *Canadian Press* [reported](#) that the Canadian government has proposed amendments to Bill C-83, which claims to end the practice of solitary confinement across Canadas federal prisons. The amendments come in response to the coroners inquest following nineteen-year-old Ashley Smiths death in 2007. Smith, a young woman with psychiatric disabilities, strangled herself at Grand Valley Institution in Ontario after spending over 1,000 days in solitary. But the mother and sister of Ashley say the bill will not truly end solitary confinement. Were absolutely furious that [the Public Safety Minister] invoked Ashleys name and tried to push forward this ridiculous agenda that has no significant impact on segregation in Canada. Some advocates say that the proposed structured intervention units merely rename solitary but would not place the necessary restrictions on isolation. The bill awaits committee decisions on further amendments.

The ACLU published an [article](#) calling on Congress to deny Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) the billions of dollars requested for the agencies by the Trump administration. The article called ICE an abusive agency, citing the documents leaked by whistleblower Ellen Gallagher revealing 8,488 incidences of solitary confinement across the agency. The reports detail the use of solitary for people having disabilities, including wearing a hand cast or needing a wheelchair; having a mental illness; identifying as LGBTQ; or for minor reasons. This week, the number of immigrants detained under the agency has reached an all-time high at 52,398. The ACLU additionally calls on Congress to pass the Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act and implement alternatives to detention, such as the Family Case Management Program.

The recently released [report](#) from the Vera Institute of Justice on solitary confinement in Louisiana found a correlation between higher incidents of self-harm and higher temperatures in restrictive housing units throughout Louisiana state prisons. The report attributes these effects to physical discomfort, psychological deterioration, and an attempt to exit the segregation tier to consult the psychiatrist in a part of the prison where there is air-conditioning. The report called for a reduction in the use of solitary confinement and recommended installing air-conditioning in all facilities, though the report also suggested short-term changes, such as prioritizing where to place air-conditioning units. While Corrections Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc claimed he does not have the resources to provide air-conditioning in all facilities, the executive director of the Promise of Justice Initiative [told](#) the *Advocate*, Compared against health care costs, it might be cheaper to provide A/C than not.

The *Denver Post* published an [article](#) on the spiraling cycle of illness for thousands of people with psychiatric disabilities being driven in and out of correctional facilities across Colorado. Since 1998, the number of incarcerated people across the state who struggle with mental health needs has more than doubled, from 4,500 to 10,700 last year. Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle said, Our jail is the largest inpatient mental health facility in Boulder County. Its not supposed to be. Due to the lack of mental health services and the increased likelihood for them to break a rule, people with psychiatric disabilities often end up isolated without treatment. Ryan Partridge was held

at the county jail in solitary confinement where his psychosis worsened so severely that he gouged out his eyeballs in 2016 and broke his back in a suicide attempt, jumping headfirst off the top tier. Gov. Jared Polis may sign a bill that would increase funding for mental health care and make adjustments to the process of transferring people to the state mental hospital.

Twin Cities Pioneer Press [reported](#) that Minnesota lawmakers passed a bill that would include funds to hire 67 new corrections officers, a provision to re-establish an ombudsman for the department, and restrictions on the states use of solitary confinement. The bill currently awaits the signature of Gov. Tim Walz, but if passed, the bill would require mental health evaluations for people before placing them in solitary confinement, mental health checks during peoples time in solitary confinement, the implementation of an alternative to solitary for people with an acute mental illness, and a ban on releasing people directly from solitary to the streets.

The *Marianas Variety* [reported](#) that the Department of Corrections of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. Commonwealth in the Pacific Ocean, has agreed to a settlement with Jerry Ray, an incarcerated man who claims that his two years in solitary was unconstitutional. The lawsuit also claimed that he was denied psychiatric mental healthcare, including evaluation, treatment, medication and counseling. In the settlement, the department agreed not to place Ray in any form of solitary confinement or strip away any privileges unless recommended by a medical or mental health professional. The department also agreed to provide Ray with outdoor recreation for one hour per day, work assignments, education, and \$500 in damages, though the lawsuit had requested Ray receive \$100 for every day he spent in solitary.

The *Marshall Project* published an [account](#) written by Frank De Palma, who spent over 22 years isolated in Nevada state prisons. De Palma writes about the paralyzing psychological effects of solitary confinement that continue to torment him since his release last year. Unable to leave the small space of his cell without severe panic attacks, De Palma developed what he calls the opposite of claustrophobia, or agoraphobia. When he would go to the shower or the exercise yard, De Palma said, It felt like so much open space, my heart was exploding, my brain was exploding. Incapable of leaving his cell to go to the dentist, four of De Palmas teeth rotted until he pulled them out himself with a mattress string. Now out of prison, De Palma says, I wear a smile on my face, but theres a war going on inside.

Sarah Shourd wrote an [op-ed](#) in the *San Francisco Chronicle* examining the changes to California prisons since 2013, when 30,000 incarcerated people engaged in a hunger strike to end the use of solitary in prisons. Following the hunger strikes, in 2015, the class action lawsuit *Ashker vs. Governor of California* was settled, transferring 1,600 people out of solitary. While Shourd says some changes have yielded significant results, such as the ban on isolating people under the unconstitutional gang validation rules, the period of court observation to monitor enforcement is set to end in January. Without this oversight, Shourd warns, its easy for corruption to seep back in. The population of the Security Housing Unit rose in 2017, and the agency has projected it to rise further in 2018-2019.

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.

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by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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