

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/rethinking-restrictive-housing>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

In recent years, the practice of restrictive housing (otherwise known as solitary confinement or segregation) in U.S. prisons and jails has been the subject of increased scrutiny from researchers, advocates, policymakers, media, and the government agencies responsible for people who are incarcerated. Originally intended to manage people who committed violence within jails and prisons, restrictive housing has become a common tool for responding to all levels of rule violations, from minor to serious; managing challenging populations; and housing people considered vulnerable, especially those living with mental illness.

A number of departments of corrections are now taking steps to reduce their reliance on restrictive housing. Through a competitive application process, Vera selected and worked with five sites: Nebraska; Oregon; North Carolina; New York City; and Middlesex County, New Jersey to study their use of restrictive housing and make recommendations for ways to reduce the practice. This report summarizes Vera's key findings and recommendations.

Explore additional [technical reports](#) for these five sites.

Our partners work shows that agencies can take steps to reduce their use of restrictive housing. Other leaders who are serious about rethinking conditions of confinement can benefit from the practical solutions described in this report.

In 2014, administrators from 40 state departments of corrections reported that they had recently conducted reviews of their restrictive housing policies; by 2016, many of those jurisdictions had planned or enacted changes to reduce their reliance on this type of custody.

Echoing disparities seen throughout the criminal justice system, Vera's analysis found that people with mental health needs, young men, and people of color were more likely to be held in restrictive housing.

Vera recommends that jails and prisons use restrictive housing only as a last resort, as a response to the most serious and threatening behavior, for the shortest time possible, and with the least restrictive conditions possible.

PUBLICATION

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