

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/06/13/california-bill-would-lift-media-ban-on-access-to-prisons/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | June 13, 2012

This important story was put out yesterday from Californians United for a Responsible Budget, via [San Francisco Bay View](#). If legislation like this were passed in other states, as well as in California, it would go a long way toward exposing to the public the truth about supermax prisons and solitary confinement units which are not only torture chambers, but also virtual domestic black sites. See [our earlier post](#) for more background on the bill.

Today, residents throughout the state celebrate as AB1270, a bill to lift the media access ban in California prisons, passed the Senate Committee on Public Safety in a 4-2 vote. AB1270 will now go to a vote in Senate Appropriations. A rally on the north steps of the Capitol was held at noon as calls for transparency in California's troubled prison system spread. Since 1996, media have been prohibited from choosing their interview subjects inside prisons, and nine versions of this bill have been vetoed by three different governors.

Supporters of AB1270 note that the Supreme Court ruling on overcrowding and unconstitutional medical and mental health conditions and last year's massive prisoner hunger strike demonstrate the need for California taxpayers to have full information about what goes on inside California's prisons. Testifying on behalf of the bill, a spokesperson for the California Newspaper Publishers Association said: With the scrutiny and limited resources now being directed to prison facilities, this bill could not be any more timely. Most newspapers have forgone these beats because there are so many limitations. It's very difficult for reporters to get in and do their jobs. A steady stream of supporters from dozens of organizations throughout the state added me to the bill.

Assembly member Tom Ammiano, D-San Francisco, sponsored the bill, citing the need for more transparency and public accountability from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Independent media access to prisoners is critical for ensuring transparency and accountability, said Ammiano. Despite the thousands of prisoners who participated in a statewide hunger strike last year over conditions in the prisons, it was near impossible to get unbiased information about what was happening due to these restrictions. Today's vote is an important step towards providing the public with balanced and necessary information about our prisons.

Read the full piece, which includes a list of the organizations supporting the bill, [here](#).

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

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There is no doubt about expected resistance to this bill. However, the argument is made that if everything is being done according to policy, transparency is a great tool to illustrate this practice. Now we know there are variances out there but the media will be controlled as it always has been so although a positive step, there will be much control in this matter if passed by the legislature.

Thanks for getting the word out to create the possibility to make change happen, but I agree with Alan that the CCPOA and California Governors have way too much control. I spent 10 years in the worst prisons in California on drug charges where I changed my life writing novels to expose corruption in the drug war and prison conditions. I'm starting a foundation to help prisoners get instructional writing guides to turn what they've been through into a blessing. <http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B00571NY5A>

Although this is sorely needed and long overdue I wouldn't hold my breath. The CCPOA will be lobbying against this and they are still the most powerful union in CA with \$s to sway votes. This is too early in the game to cheer. In the meantime time keeps ticking for those the system holds.

Reblogged this on <http://www.HumansinShadow.wordpress.com/>.

Progress, and progress is good: baby steps but any step forward is good. Now the light will reach many others oblivious of the darkness that has existed for so long and with so much pain and sorrow.

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