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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | November 11, 2018

[According](#) to the *Chicago Reporter*, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago increased its use of solitary confinement on children by nearly 25 percent from 2016 to 2017, despite a twenty percent drop in the detained juvenile population. Superintendent Leonard Dixon believes that solitary is something that you use to ensure that your facility doesn't get out of control, while advocates, mental health professionals, and other juvenile corrections administrators point to the lasting psychological harms caused by solitary, which are especially damaging during adolescent development. Pediatrician and professor of medicine Mikah Owen said, There is a developmentally appropriate way to address kids who are experiencing [the effects of trauma], and that is not locking them in a cell.

The *Palm Beach Post* [reported](#) that the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office (PBSO) has agreed to a settlement that is supposed to ban the use of solitary confinement at the Main Detention Center in Florida, after a lawsuit claimed the facility inflicted cruel and unusual punishment on teens and violated their rights of due process by isolating them in unhygienic conditions, and sometimes using suicide watch, where they would be stripped naked and left in a freezing cell, as further punishment. The PBSO has agreed to implement a new segregated housing policy in place of solitary, where teens would have access to mental health treatment and education outside of their cells, though teens will still be subjected to protective custody. The Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County and the Human Rights Defense Center will monitor the implementation of the reforms for two years.

UC Davis sociology professor Caitlin Patler authored a study that investigated the use of solitary confinement in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities across the country. Although detained immigrants face civil not criminal charges, the study found parallels in the imposition of punishment between the U.S. prison system and the immigration detention system. In an examination of 1,193 incidents in ICE facilities, the study document[s] the extensive use of solitary confinement for protective custody and show[s] that this category is potentially punitive in nature, though in most cases, the individual had not broken any rules. Additionally, the study found that mentally ill individuals were vastly overrepresented, making up 57 percent of the solitary cases, but only fifteen percent of the detained ICE population. [According](#) to the *California Aggie*.

The *Florida Times-Union* published an [article](#) detailing the death of 54-year-old Gregory Allan Futch in the custody of the Putnam County jail in Florida in February of this year. Futch was originally admitted to the jail after his mother was told that jail administrators would take him to the hospital to address his mental health episode. Despite his severe mental health and medical issues, including dehydration, vomiting, lung disease, kidney failure, and low blood pressure, jail staff placed him in solitary confinement and later medical isolation. Futch died less than a month after having arrived at the jail. While the Sheriff's Office reported that Futch died of natural causes, a respected correctional doctor hired by Futch's mother found that her son's death was easily preventable.

Public Source published the [story](#) of Raymond Miles, who had no history of mental illness before spending sixteen months in solitary confinement at SCI Somerset in Pennsylvania, where over time, he says, he deteriorated into psychotic and self-destructive behavior. Miles describes being in a neighboring cell to Daniel Delker, who has been in solitary for 44 years for the murder of a corrections officer, and who introduced Miles to Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which he says changed his way of thinking. While he has continued to struggle with mental health issues since leaving prison, Miles has founded an organization to help others returning to society, called Realistic ReEntry.

Scientific American [covered](#) a panel discussion of neuroscientists, lawyers, and formerly incarcerated Angola 3 member Robert King on the impact of solitary on the brain, at the annual Society for Neuroscience meeting. King talked about the cognitive damage he has experienced from his time in isolation, including impaired memory, loss of his ability to navigate, and temporary loss of his ability to recognize faces. Neurologist Richard Smeyne affirmed King's experiences through a study he conducted on mice, which revealed sensory and motor neurons in the mice brains shrunk by twenty percent after one month of isolation. We see solitary confinement as nothing less than a death penalty by social deprivation, said University of Chicago professor Stephanie Cacioppo.

Architects, Designers, and Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) published a [post](#) commending the American Institute of Architects for the recent revision of its Code of Ethics in Professional Conduct, prohibiting discrimination and harassment and the wanton disregard of the rights of others, disallowing architects from designing spaces to be used for solitary confinement or execution

chambers. ADPSR, which has pushed for these changes since 2013, said, Who can doubt that designing a space where someone will be killed or tortured shows wanton disregard for the rights of the victims in those spaces?

USA Today published an [opinion piece](#) by Justice Rountree, who spent five years in solitary confinement in New Jersey prisons and now works with the New Jersey Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement. Despite the states claim that it does not use solitary in its prisons, Rountree cites a recently released report by the Association of State Correctional Administrators and the Arthur Liman Center that shows New Jersey uses solitary with frequency, under the name of restrictive housing. The truth is, Rountree says, that New Jersey isolates people of color at massively disproportionate rates, by national comparison. The truth is that New Jersey holds people in isolation for longer durations than 46 of the 50 states. Rountree calls for support for the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act, which aims to greatly reduce the use of solitary in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement published interviews with [Nafeesah Goldsmith](#) and [Mark Hopkins](#), who experienced solitary for 60 days and 180 days respectively in New Jersey prisons. Hopkins, who first experienced solitary at age 16, recalled another time he was placed in solitary at a halfway house in the suicide watch unit. A couple guys were trying to kill themselves, he said. One guy across from me was screaming, banging his head on the glass until it was just blood everywhere. He was eating his own fecal matter. The only thing they did with him would just beat him up more and then strap him to a chair and then put a needle in him after he begged them not to. Goldsmith, when asked how she would explain solitary, said, I would describe it as being an animal in a cage. Thats it.

Valerie Kiebala 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.

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