

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Lizzie Kane](#) | February 9, 2021

Brie Williams, Professor of Medicine at University of California San Francisco and director of the group AMEND, and UCSF medical school student Amanda Li [wrote in the Public Health Post](#) about a study their team conducted. The study found that the prevalence of high blood pressure was 31% higher among those held in solitary confinement. Based on a conservative estimate that 25,000 people are currently held in extreme isolation conditions in the United States, they concluded that the increase in high blood pressure alone from such conditions of solitary confinement results in at least 78 additional heart attacks, 163 additional strokes, and 5,673 additional QALYs [quality-adjusted life years] lost over their lifetimes. Williams and Li also wrote that the use of solitary adds \$155 million to medical costs. The authors encourage others to join their fight for reform.

[According to the Richmond Times](#), Virginia State Senator Joe Morrissey (D-Richmond) introduced a bill to end the use of solitary confinement in the state unless needed for medical or mental health treatment, or if an inmate posed a threat to himself or another person. The Virginia Department of Corrections estimated that it would cost them \$23 million every year if the bill passes. Morrissey was highly skeptical of the DOCs figure and believes eliminating solitary would save the state money, but he suggested amendments at a Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee meeting to address the cost concerns. The committee signed off on the bill, but included a provision that it could only become law if money to pay for it is budgeted. [The AP](#) reported that Bill 1301 now goes to the full Senate and would take effect in July 2022 if passed.

[WSHU Public Radio reported](#) that Connecticut legislators announced a bill to close Northern Correctional Institution, a notorious supermax prison in the state. If passed, Northern would be closed and demolished by the end of the year, and an independent committee would also be formed to oversee the states department of corrections. Advocates from the StopSolitaryCT coalition [announced a campaign](#) to close Northern at a press conference last month.

During an uprising in the St. Louis City Justice Center, incarcerated individuals started fires and destroyed parts of the jail in a third effort to protest unsafe conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also called for the release of 57 people who were moved to an even more notorious city jail known as the Workhouse and put in solitary confinement after one of their previous protests, [according to Law & Crime](#). A detailed list of the incarcerated individuals demands can be found [in this Twitter thread](#).

[The Equal Justice Initiative wrote](#) about Tommy Lee Rutledge, a man who died of hyperthermia in December in the Donaldson Prison in Alabama. On an evening when it was 31 degrees outside, Rutledge was in the mental health ward where individuals never leave their cells when the temperature in his space rose above 100 degrees. He was in solitary confinement for most of his time incarcerated and had serious mental illness. Two days after Rutledge's death, the US Department of Justice filed a civil rights complaint against the state, alleging that the states indifference to the systemic problems in Alabamas prisons for men violates the Constitution.

Eunice Cho and Jackie Gonzaleza senior staff attorney at the National Prison Project with the ACLU and the policy director for Immigrant Defense Advocates, respectively [wrote an opinion piece in the Orange County Register](#) about how ICE detention centers have been notorious sites of human rights abuse for years, but conditions grew significantly worse under the Trump administration and during COVID-19. According to Cho and Gonzalez, one action item for the Biden administration should be to ban solitary confinement as a tool to contain the spread of the virus in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. They said that public health experts have warned that the practice makes the virus spread faster. Cho and Gonzalez also call for the new administration to end all prolonged solitary confinement in ICE detention centers.

The [National Catholic Reporter published an article](#) on the involvement of local Catholics in the ongoing #HALTsolitary campaign in New York State. The campaign seeks to pass the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, which would limit the use of solitary to 15 days, ban it all together for vulnerable populations, and create more humane and effective alternatives. Members of the Catholic social justice group Call to Action, which supports the legislation, attended a webinar featuring survivors of solitary confinement, as well as a psychiatrist who pioneered the study of solitary's harmful effects on mental health. We have hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters pulled into the criminal justice system and incarcerated because of the color of their skin, the group said in a statement. While in prison they are subjected to the torture of solitary confinement.

Lizzie Kane was an intern for Solitary Watch in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. Her work has also appeared in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Dallas Morning News, and Charlotte Observer.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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