

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | April 15, 2019

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [reported](#) that the Georgia Advocacy Office and the Southern Center for Human Rights filed a lawsuit, claiming that women with psychiatric disabilities reside isolated in unimaginable conditions, including pools of urine, food and feces-smear floors, a smell of vomit, and overflowing toilets. Attorney Sarah Geraghty from the Southern Center said, It is unacceptable in our modern era to isolate anyone with a psychiatric disability in prolonged solitary confinement. But to keep women charged with low-level misdemeanors in these wretched conditions for months on end is particularly pointless and cruel. The Southern Center had been warning the county since last summer that it would file a civil rights lawsuit if the barbaric conditions at the jail did not improve.

[According](#) to the *Houston Chronicle*, forty people committed suicide in the custody of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) last year the highest prison suicide rate the state has seen in twenty years. Doug Smith, a policy analyst for the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, called for a deeper investigation into the cause of the rising rate of suicides. I have no idea why this is happening and neither does TDCJ, Smith said. Greg Hansch of the National Alliance of Mental Illness Texas suggested the use of solitary and overall inhumane conditions are contributing factors. I am certain there have been suicides that directly resulted from the conditions, including the temperature that those facilities are placed at. One mother is suing TDCJ over the 2017 suicide of her nineteen-year-old son with severe psychiatric disabilities who hanged himself after allegedly being left unsupervised in a solitary cell.

East Bay Times [reported](#) that two former deputies of Alameda County, California, face charges for provoking the assault of incarcerated men held in the solitary confinement unit, or administrative segregation, at the Santa Rita Jail. At the trial last week, men held at the jail testified that the two officers knowingly allowed and provided additional privileges to incarcerated men who would distribute bottles of feces and urine for men to spray at others. The officers, also accused of preventing men from leaving their excrement-covered cells for days, allegedly joked about the men throwing crappuccinos of fecal matter, typically referred to as gassing. The officers additionally face charges of witness intimidation for threatening the man who exposed the officers actions and attempting to label him a snitch.

In an [interview](#) with the *Colorado Independent*, the new head of Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) Dean Williams discussed thoughts and plans for the future of the states correctional system. Williams, who has headed the CDOC for just three months and replaces reformer Rick Raemisch, says he would have to visit every state correctional facility before he can confidently confirm that Colorados ban on solitary confinement is comprehensively being implemented statewide. Regarding the shuttered supermax prison Centennial South in Caon City, Williams supports keeping it available for emergency use but possibly renovating it in the future to eliminate its solitary confinement-based structure. Williams says his highest priority is providing resources and assistance to people re-entering society.

Connecticut News Junkie [reported](#) several criminal justice bills passed the state Judiciary Committee last week, including one placing strict limits on the use of solitary confinement. Rep. Robyn Porter emphasized the ethical urgency of prohibiting the use of solitary confinement. If we did to animals what we did to people [in isolation] you would be facing prison time for animal cruelty, Porter said. Yale University researcher Judith Resnik [told](#) WNPR that now the question is how to unravel practices that have built up over several decades, that have produced tens of thousands of people held 22 hours or more, for fifteen days or more, and many people weeks, months, years and decades.

[According](#) to *Cleveland.com*, corrections officers at the Cuyahoga County Jail in Ohio are accused of attacking 29-year-old Chantelle Glass, a mother of three who had been arrested over an unpaid traffic ticket. When Glass continued to request a phone call, the officers allegedly restrained her to a chair, punched her in the head, and pepper-sprayed her from a foot away. Even though Glass told the officers she had asthma and couldn't breathe, they isolated her and refused to allow her to use the bathroom or wash the pepper spray off her skin. Five officers now face charges of civil rights violations, though one of the officers has not been located.

The State [investigated](#) the South Carolina prison system and produced a scathing multi-part series on the horrendous conditions found there. The series comes one year after a riot at Lee Correctional Institution, when seven incarcerated men were killed and over 22 injured. While the director of the states department of corrections discussed newly implemented changes such as cameras, fencing, and body scanners aimed at minimizing the violence, lawyer Ed Bell said, We have sworn testimony from a warden who admitted that the

gangs are running the jails. Now that's astounding. A 2017 state report found that severe understaffing often leads to lockdowns, which in turn has contributed to increased violence. One incarcerated man said, If you keep someone in a cell everyday all day, feed and talk and treat them like an animal, yes, they get aggressive, frustrated and may seem like an animal. Other articles in the series document corruption among staff, and extreme medical neglect leading to blindness, permanent disability, and death including the death of an infant that took place after a woman was left to give birth alone in a prison bathroom.

[According](#) to *Fox News*, correctional officers will not be charged with civil rights violations over incidents of abuse, use of chemical restraints, and use of solitary confinement on youth held at two Wisconsin correctional facilities. Lawsuits claim that staff at the Lincoln Hill School for boys and the Copper Lake School for girls isolated children and used excessive force, in some cases leading to broken bones and suicide attempts. Governor Scott Walker signed a bill approving the closure of the facilities by 2021 and funding the construction of smaller, more humane facilities for youth. Sen. Lena Taylor said, We know that something was very wrong at Lincoln Hills. There are lawsuits, injured youth and records of excessive use of pepper spray and solitary confinement to support that belief.

The Justice Collaborative published a [document](#) outlining A Blueprint for a Safer and More Just America with recommendations for reforming the criminal justice system. Highlighting social inequalities, discriminatory policies, and human rights violations, the group calls for a plan that includes no sentence longer than fifteen years without possibility of release, an end to the barbaric practice of solitary confinement, and the closure of every youth prison in America, among numerous other components.

NPR published an [article](#) discussing a recent report released by Disability Rights California, documenting human rights violations at the Adelanto Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility. The report confirmed the findings of the state attorney general's investigation, which revealed the use of pepper spray, the use of solitary confinement, inadequate mental health services, and medical negligence at the privately operated facility. Most of the detained immigrants face no criminal charges, including Mario, a man seeking asylum from Mexico to escape persecution for being gay. During his six-month detention at Adelanto, Mario was denied mental health services and placed in solitary confinement for a week after harming himself.

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.

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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