

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/01/24/twelve-years-in-solitary-and-still-in-illegal-limbo/>

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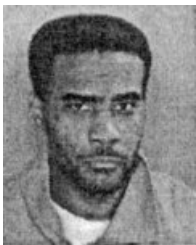
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by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#) | January 24, 2013

[Click here](#) to listen to an interview on Paul Rogers with advocate Lois Ahrens and sister Kharla Rogers.



Paul Rogers has spent more than 4,300 consecutive days over 12 years locked behind a solid steel door in the bowels of a Pennsylvania prison. He spends twenty-four hours a day in isolation, occasionally punctuated by an hour in another cage for recreation purposes, or a trip to the shower. Inside a concrete and steel tomb that is his bathroom, bedroom, and workspace, Rogers eats, sleeps, dreams, defecates, reads, writes, and contemplates the prospect of spending the remainder of his life sentence in solitary confinement. According to Rogers, It's like mental torture and you slowly lose your mind.

Rogers has once again been approved for release into the general population by the Superintendent of the State Correctional Institution (SCI) Smithfield. For most prisoners in the hole this would be sufficient for securing their release, but Paul is on the Restricted Release List (RRL), an indefinite, secretive and potentially permanent form of solitary confinement that can only be authorized with the approval of PA DOC Central Office. The final decision on Paul's status rests with Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC) Secretary John Wetzel.

Contrary to the claim that solitary is reserved for the worst of the worst, Rogers has had an exemplary disciplinary record these twelve years, not once receiving a misconduct for a serious infraction. Despite making his best effort to conform to DOC standards, he was again rejected for release from the RRL during his February 2012 review, although he was provided no specific reason as to why he had to remain in solitary. I have complied to a work plan, have no misconducts, and still wasn't recommended for release off the RRL. I have been arbitrarily denied release off the RRL without being given a written reason or opportunity to defend myself.

Echoing the symptoms reported by others subjected to the infamous no-touch torture of isolation, Rogers has experienced depression, heightened anxiety, difficulty concentrating, deterioration of social skills, and an all too real fear of losing his sanity. As is customary in the PA DOC, mental health care is utterly lacking for those languishing in the Restricted Housing Units (RHUs). In correspondence to the Human Rights Coalition, Rogers wrote:

I don't think my mental health is a concern of the DOC, and I have been trying self-help remedies to maintain my mental care. The health department visit me every 90 days at my cell door for less than a few minutes, and from past experience they don't offer any assistance other than medication, which seems to make prisoners worse and psychotic. . . . [W]hen I try to get help for my problems, I was told being the RHU prevents them from offering remedies besides medication.

Now 43, Rogers is serving a life sentence for a murder committed when he was 19 years old. In the late 1990s, he was placed in solitary for three-and-one-half years. Rogers has said that the psychological effects of this prolonged solitary confinement without access to any rehabilitative programs made it difficult for him to adjust to general population in the prison, and led to a physical altercation with a prison guard in the year 2000. He was placed in solitary following that assault, and has not been released to this day.

Twice during his time on the RRL Rogers was approved for release from solitary confinement by the Superintendent of the State Correctional Institution (SCI) Smithfield, only to be overruled by then-Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC), Jeffrey Beard.

In an essay entitled [Still in Illegal Limbo](#), available on the [Real Cost of Prisons Project](#) website, Rogers described the devastating effects of more than a decade in solitary:

It's obvious that prisoners on the RRL pose no threat of mass murder and destruction. How is it deemed constitutional to treat us as such, condemning us to indefinite isolation, sensory deprivation, and mental torture. The prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement has serious psychological and emotional effects, hinders rehabilitation and family ties. While I have access to the phone, mail, and no-contact visitation, these are no replacement for natural physical contact, being embraced by the loving arms of family and loved ones.

Bret Grote is an investigator with the Human Rights Coalition, a Pennsylvania-based prison abolitionist and prisoner rights organization.

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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Paul Rogers has now been released into the general population.

I am a very serious advocate on the non-use of Isolation As long as the Confined is not a threat to other prisoners. The problems from and advocate is we do not have full access to the reasons for confinement. My problems, is I have been witness to men that waited years to get out of solitary only to seek revenge on someone in the prison.. So I am not as easy to release as those who may have never been behind the Wall or even know how one works themselves into Isolation To put the whole weight on the Department of Correction is a bogus charge; you have to do something and you have to continue in questionable behavior or be a political activist to be in Isolation long term; so I do not jump hoops until I do diligent research..

@Fr good point, though torturing a human being still does not seem to be the right answer.

Seems the system doesn't offer any redemption if a CO is involved. Look at Tommy Silverstein. 23 years good conduct and not an ounce of relief from his tomb. I will never understand.

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