

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/07/22/montana-teen-who-faced-torture-in-prison-asks-judge-to-keep-him-out-of-solitary/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | July 22, 2010

CHILDREN IN LOCKDOWN

One of the [first posts we wrote on Solitary Watch](#), when we started the site back in December, was the story of a teen suffering from depression and PTSD who was living in solitary confinement at Montana State Prison, in conditions that the American Civil Liberties Union did not hesitate to identify as torture. At the time, the teen was 17, and referred to as Robert Doe. The ACLU of Montana took up his case after he attempted suicide several times in his cell, and eventually [called on the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture](#) to intervene on the teen's behalf.

The case epitomizes the plight of two groups of inmates: juveniles in adult prisons, and prisoners suffering from mental illness. Members of both these groups are disproportionately likely to end up in solitary confinement, even though they are even less equipped than other prisoners to tolerate the effects of long-term isolation.

This week, the ACLU appealed to a federal judge to keep the teen now 18 and identified as Raistlen Katka out of solitary confinement. The [Billings Gazette reports](#):

An 18-year-old Montana State Prison inmate who claims he has been treated inhumanely is asking a district court judge to step in to keep him from returning to a solitary cell and other treatment he and his lawyers say is deplorable and scarring.

Raistlen Katka testified Tuesday that he has attempted suicide four times in part due to his treatment at the prison. According to Katka's attorneys with the American Civil Liberties Union of Montana, an injunction is needed to stop the irreparable harm being done by the prison.

A hearing was held before District Judge Jeffrey Sherlock to give Katka and the prison a chance to argue their cases.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit against the Montana Department of Corrections and the state in December on behalf of Katka, alleging he had been treated illegally and inhumanely. The situation became so dire, Katka testified Tuesday, that he twice attempted to kill himself by biting through the skin on his wrist to puncture a vein.

My thought process was if I don't die, at least I'll get out of my cell for 30 seconds, Katka testified.

Katka is being housed at the Montana State Hospital pending the ruling on the injunction. Testimony will continue today.

Attorneys representing the state said the confinement in the prison's maximum-security unit helped to protect Katka and other inmates in addition to preserving order at the facility.

Katka and his attorneys say his treatment at the prison has exacerbated his mental illness, which includes depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. They are asking that Katka not be subjected to solitary confinement, not be disciplined with acts such as the removal of personal property from his cell and be transferred to another facility where his needs can be better met.

Maxon Davis, a Great Falls attorney representing the state, argued Katka was a danger to himself and others and that was evident by his criminal history, including violent crimes, dating back to the age of 10.

Katka said he didn't tell prison officials about his suicidal thoughts for fear of punishment.

At the prison, Katka's available mental health treatment consists of a staff member knocking on his door once a week and asking if he has any concerns, according to his attorneys, and then he must answer by yelling within earshot of other inmates.

I think the state has proven in this case that they are not willing or able to provide the mental illness treatment he needs, said Andree Larose, a Helena attorney representing Katka. He needs a chance and that chance can't come from the prison treating him like an animal.

Katka said much of his time at the prison he was in a solitary cell with only a mattress and blanket and dressed in a smock



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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

I hope when this guy gets out he gets a gun and makes himself some justice.

Watch this video of another case if you have the stomach for it. A warning it is hard to watch.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2458916n&tag=related:photovideo>

It even captures the poor mans death.

His crime shoplifting while mentally ill.

poor kid i hope he wins his case no one should go through solitary let alone a kid even and with that disorder it is not going to do any good for him at all may there be light in the darkness of justice

How can we stand behind this kind of punishment? Who are the real insane and violent? The inmates or the keepers? We need to make the necessary changes in our prisons through new legislation and making the keepers accountable for their treatment and care of the inmates who have mental problems.

P.S. After I read this story first time I wrote the governor of Montana relayed this story and told him he/state were an embarrassment to America.

I hadn't realized you guys were that new, this particular story was one of the first I blogged about, Well I have had your link up since I started in Jan10 and almost every letter I write to an official in Government I cite this blog

Barbaric!!

Help the boy!! one day he will return and he needs to be able to learn how to live

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



