

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Roxanne Barnes](#) | November 24, 2021

A state court judge ruled that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) inflicted cruel and unusual punishment on people held at San Quentin State Prison, ruling that because [CDCR] did not reduce the population as recommended, it effectively consigned hundreds of [incarcerated persons] to unwarranted, unnecessary, solitary confinement. Juan Moreno Haines, an incarcerated journalist in San Quentin, has written extensively about his experience, including as a [Solitary Watch](#) Contributing Writer. As Haines wrote in *The Appeal* last year, prisoners are reluctant to report when they're sick because everyone knows they'll be sent to Carson, known as The Hole, where prisoners are kept in the punishing conditions of solitary confinement.

The Michigan Daily [reported](#) on an exhibit depicting the experience of a solitary confinement cell that the Citizens for Prison Reform (CPR) initiative set up in the halls of the University of Michigan campus. The exhibit, comprised of a canvas tarp structure, and a child sized cot, sink and toilet, was a collaboration between CPR and a class that focuses on criminal and juvenile justice. This is the approximate size of a restrictive housing unit or isolation cell, Lois Pullano, founder and leader of CPR, described. Individuals in Michigan are held in this space, most of them for 22 or more hours a day.

The Government Accountability Project, which represents the whistleblower Ellen Gallagher, [demanded](#) that Congress and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas end the use of solitary confinement in immigration detention. Gallagher first tried to raise concerns about ICE's violation of segregation policies seven years ago as an employee with DHS's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, before going public in 2019. The Government Accountability Project [urged the Senate Judiciary Committee](#), where Mayorkas appeared last week, to question him on ICE's longstanding and abusive use of solitary confinement on detained immigrants.

The Press Herald [reported](#) that people in solitary confinement in the Maine State Prison were on a hunger strike for four days, demanding access to phone calls, religious services, and educational and rehabilitative programming. According to prison advocate Jan Collins, some in the unit have spent months or years there, spending 22 hours a day inside their cells. It is unclear whether any of their demands were met at the end of the strike.

The ACLU of Arizona issued a [press release](#) detailing the devastating amount of evidence they are presenting in a trial against the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC), demonstrating that ADC has abdicated its responsibility to deliver health care and conditions in ADC's isolation units are gratuitously cruel, including the indefinite incarceration in solitary confinement of seriously mentally ill persons and children who were convicted as adults. This trial began on November 1st, after ADC was noncompliant with the terms of a settlement reached with the ACLU of Arizona back in 2012.

Gay City News [published](#) an op-ed from Melania Brown, a prison rights activist whose sister Layleen Polanco died in solitary confinement on Rikers Island, calling on New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson to end the use of solitary in New York City jails. She urges him to fully ban the use of social isolation, at a time when the mayor has suspended protections for people in jail, saying, "The city continues to break their promise to me and my family to end solitary confinement."

Roxanne Barnes is an educator and writer based in Los Angeles and a contributing writer to Solitary Watch.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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