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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 14, 2018

Yale University's Liman Center, in partnership with the Association of State Correctional Administrators, produced a report [Reforming Restrictive Housing](#) with data collected in 2017 of the number of people in restricted housing in federal and state prisons across the nation. The survey, based on numbers reported by the prisons, found that the number of people in solitary dropped from 68,000 in 2015 to 61,000 in 2017. The numbers do not include people held in solitary for less than 15 days, or those in solitary in jails or in juvenile, military, or immigration facilities. A [second report](#) released at the same time highlights solitary reforms in four states: Colorado, Idaho, Ohio, and North Dakota.

The *Washington Post* published an [editorial](#), encouraging the shift towards rehabilitative-minded reform in certain states that the numbers in the Liman/ASCA report seem to suggest. The article says, Much more reform is needed, citing that eleven states reported an increase in the use of solitary since 2015 and nearly everywhere, black inmates are overrepresented among those in solitary, and whites are underrepresented. The article criticizes any use of solitary, concluding, Inmates who have been warehoused in solitary confinement are prone to emerge damaged and ill-equipped to reenter society. That's a practical concern; it's also an affront to human decency.

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor expressed her deeply troubling concern with the use of solitary confinement in the case of three men who had been held in administrative segregation at the Colorado State Penitentiary for periods of eleven to 25 months. Sotomayor agreed with the court's decision to deny the case a Supreme Court trial, but she said, It should be clear by now that our Constitution does not permit such a total deprivation in the absence of a particularly compelling interest, [according](#) to *Courthouse News Service*. While the Colorado Department of Corrections has reduced its use of solitary and eliminated administrative segregation last year, Sotomayor said this cannot undo what petitioners, and others similarly situated, have experienced.

A recently released investigation from NPR and Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism [found that](#) certain states isolate women at higher rates than men. At the root of the discrepancy, one expert explained, is that 80 to 90 percent of women in prison have been victims of sexual or physical violence, which may cause them to vocally resist orders, especially from male correctional officers, and violate more minor rules. In one case, a woman was sent to solitary for reckless eye-balling when a guard gave her an order. The high rate of disciplinary punishments, often resulting in solitary, increased sentences, or denial of privileges, affects women differently than men, since they are more likely the caregiving parent of a child and denial of commissary can mean lack of access to women's hygiene products.

The Intercept [reported](#) that Jeancarlo Alfonso Jimenez-Joseph, a 27-year-old Panamanian man with a history of mental illness and suicidal tendencies, had called the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) help line six weeks before he killed himself in his solitary cell at the ICE facility Stewart Detention Center in Georgia in May of last year. This was a cry for help, said the Jimenez-Joseph family lawyer. The article states, The existence of the call shows that ICE officials far beyond Stewart Detention Center, or even the agency's broader region, had also been warned of Jimenez-Joseph's deteriorating psychological conditions. Despite this awareness of his hallucinations and suicidal thoughts, the facility still placed him in solitary after he jumped from the second tier, which he told mental health staff was an attempt to harm himself.

The Crime Report published an [article](#) on the steep rise of immigrant youth incarceration since 2014, when 60,000 unaccompanied minors traveled to the U.S. from Latin America, escaping poverty and gang violence. According to the communications director for the National Center for Youth Law, The government is gearing up for mass incarceration of children, children who don't have protection of the U.S. juvenile justice system. The director of Experiential Learning with Tulane University School of Law explained that the Trump administration has revived the now-discredited myth of super-predator youth to label innocent Latin American youth as MS-13 gang members and throw them into detention centers, where they are often isolated in caged play areas and forcibly administered anti-psychotic medication.

The Vera Institute of Justice released a report called [Reimagining Prison](#), calling for a vision of justice that acknowledges the brutal history of dehumanization and racial oppression at the root of the U.S. criminal justice system and moves beyond archaic systems of punishment, such as solitary confinement, that continue to recreate these regressive principles. The report calls for a dignity-centric

prison system that must ensure that those sent to such housing retain meaningful social contact with others by, for example, requiring a minimum amount of staff contact, allowing for social activities with others who are incarcerated, and ensuring interactions with other individuals, such as psychologists, religious representatives, and community volunteers.

WBFO [reported](#) that a group of activists in Buffalo, New York held a demonstration this week in support of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act currently pending in the New York State Senate. The group placed a mock solitary cell on the sidewalk to familiarize passersby with the experience of isolation. One member of the group, Jerome Wright, who spent several years in solitary, compared the mock cell to the cell he experienced. The dimensions is accurate, the ambiance is accurate, and the difference is that when you go in there, from out here, you know youre going to get let out. And that puts a whole nother level of intensity that nobody can understand unless you can actually experience.

Valerie Kiebala 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

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.

My son is incarcerated in Texas. He has been isolated for over a year. TDCJ guards are demeaning and strip humane treatment from these men who grow angry and bitter. Need reformation.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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