

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](#) | August 19, 2021

A [New Yorker article](#) by Eyal Press looks at the work of Angela Armstrong, who has spent the past decade examining conditions inside of carceral facilities in Louisiana. This past June, she launched a revolutionary database compiling death statistics for Louisiana prisons and jails, attempting to improve transparency. Armstrong's database reports on individuals moved to solitary confinement instead of being treated for mental health issues, people whose deaths were coded as medical despite dying of blunt-force trauma, and other human rights violations that were never adequately investigated. The article questions the larger social structures and attitudes that permit horrific conditions in prisons and jails, even those that result in preventable deaths.

From [SF Public Press](#), San Quentin State Prison has reported four incarcerated individuals with COVID-19 in a new outbreak. The California prison has begun putting different units into quarantine, trying to act more quickly than it did during outbreaks last summer. San Quentin was one of the hardest hit facilities nationally: three quarters of the prison population contracted the virus, and 28 incarcerated people died as a result of the crisis. San Quentin News journalist Juan Moreno Haines reported on the conditions of life inside locked-down, virus-ridden San Quentin last summer in [an article](#) for Solitary Watch, and elaborated in [another article](#) on his personal experience contracting the virus and being placed solitary. As multiple facilities across the country return to using solitary confinement in response to the Delta Variant, [a 2020 report](#) from the Unlock the Box campaign, written by Solitary Watch, is once again highly relevant, documenting how isolation is inhumane and offers inadequate protection from COVID-19.

A [Boston Globe Spotlight exposé](#) about conditions in the Massachusetts Souza-Baranowski Maximum Security building centers around the facility's violent response, in January 2020, to an assault in which several corrections officers were injured. After the attack, the facility completely reorganized its control structure, and in the process, two men suspected of having participated were badly beaten by staff. One of the men told the Globe, I tried to call for medical. I wasn't getting it. I'm not too proud to say that I cried. Despite a veil of secrecy characteristic of Souza, the Globe discovered that 118 grievances for excessive force were filed in 2020, more than half of which at the beginning of the year, as well as numerous first-hand accounts of brutal retaliation.

The [Philadelphia Inquirer reports](#) that Arthur Cetewayo Johnson, a man who spent the last 50 years incarcerated in Pennsylvania, 37 of which in solitary confinement, has been released from prison. The Pennsylvania DA stated that his conviction was fraught with false and highly suspect statements. One of the suspect pieces of evidence in Johnson's conviction was the testimony of a 15-year-old, who the DA claimed had been coerced after a 30-hour interrogation. Johnson spent nearly four decades in a solitary cell confined for 23 hours a day, all the time maintaining his innocence. In 2017, the Abolitionist Law Center won his release into general population, and after four years the same legal team succeeded in having his case reviewed and dismissed.

In Pennsylvania, [Patch reports](#) on the introduction of a bill in the state Senate that would ban the use of solitary confinement. Senators backing the bill Katie Muth and John Kane insisted that, Solitary confinement runs counter to the goals of rehabilitation, and that, state resources should be spent on evidence-based, common sense programs that help people rehabilitate and treat the mental health, addiction, physical, social, or emotional issues that caused them to commit crimes. The Pennsylvania House of Representatives has also taken action against solitary confinement. In March, a bill was introduced in the house limiting solitary to 15 days. Both the House and Senate bills have been referred to their respective Judiciary Committees. The future for these two bills are unclear in the heavily Republican Pennsylvania legislature.

[Mississippi Today reports](#) that the state Department of Corrections faces allegations of inhumane and discriminatory conditions and practices in correctional facilities from Mississippi Disability Rights. The civil rights organization filed a class action lawsuit accusing MDOC and their contracted health service, VitalCore, of violating individuals' rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act, detailing 31 cases across multiple state facilities. The lawsuit describes one case in which a man imprisoned in the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Pearl was confined in solitary for 30 days after requesting medication for his spinal injury. The suit accuses MDOC of both systematic discrimination based on inadequate medical provision and inaccessible facilities, and retaliation against people with disabilities who request care.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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