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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | February 4, 2019

The *New York Times* [reported](#) that 36-year-old Lamekia Dockery, mother of five children, died in July of last year at the Elkhart Community Corrections facility in Indiana after being denied medical attention for six days. In response to Dockery's constant vomiting and screams of pain, correctional staff accused her of lying, wrote her up for disturbance, and placed her in solitary confinement, which they call, the tank. After several pleas to be taken to a hospital and banging on the door of her solitary cell, Dockery was shackled and ordered to calm down. On July 31, Lamekia Dockery died of sepsis, which the county coroner said was likely caused by a perforated ulcer in the intestine. No staff has been criminally charged. Dockery's aunt said, She was a black woman, and they say she was on drugs, so they looked down on her.

An [article](#) in *The Appeal* discussed the deaths of Keith Kosirog and Adonus Encinias, who committed suicide on the same day last December in the Central New Mexico Correctional Facility (CNMF) in solitary confinement. Last month, Kosirog's family filed a lawsuit, claiming that the prison staff had failed to take his history of mental illness, including PTSD and a family history of suicides, into account before they placed him in solitary for safekeeping. Another lawsuit, filed by the mother of Francisco Luevano, claims the 36-year-old wasn't found until hours after he had died in his solitary cell at the Penitentiary of New Mexico, though Luevano was supposed to be checked every twenty minutes. Legislators plan to reintroduce a bill previously vetoed by former Governor Susana Martinez, which would implement restrictions on the use of solitary for children and people with psychiatric disabilities.

The *Press-Enterprise* [reported](#) that sixteen men held in the administrative segregation unit at the Robert Presley Detention Center in California organized a hunger strike last week in protest of the conditions in their unit, where they are kept isolated for all but 30 minutes a day. The grievances of the hunger strikers included lack of medical care, people with psychiatric disabilities being housed in the segregation unit without proper care, denial of the 30 minutes out-of-cell time, and lack of access to hygiene items. The hunger strike started on Monday, January 14, and lasted until Friday, January 18. A hunger strike in 2017, in which more than 20 people in the same administrative segregation unit participated, petitioned for many of the same demands, but the strike lasted nineteen days with no policy changes.

[According](#) to *The Appeal*, 115 incarcerated people at Rush City Correctional Center in Minnesota engaged in a work stoppage late last year, protesting high canteen prices, guard abuse, overcrowding, and the use of solitary confinement. The protest came shortly after Antonio Williams was sent to administrative segregation during his talk with newly incarcerated people about their rights at the facility. Williams said: My time in solitary confinement was torturous. The conditions back there are meant to break you. While the nationwide response to prison protests typically involves retaliation against incarcerated people, placement in solitary confinement, and denial of privileges, the Rush City labor strike resulted in a meeting with the warden, who agreed to negotiate some of the incarcerated people's grievances.

[According](#) to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Illman ruled last week that California prisons continue to violate the 2015 agreement reached in the *Ashker v. Governor of California* lawsuit, which showed that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) misused, or in some cases fabricated, gang classifications to send people to solitary confinement and deny parole opportunities. Though the number of people held in solitary in California prisons has dropped from 10,000 in 2012 to below 2,000, the magistrate ruled that the CDCR systematically relies on confidential information without ensuring its reliability, thus improperly returning [people] to solitary confinement and violating their rights of due process.

A lawsuit filed on behalf of Aaron Fillmore, a man held in the Illinois prison system, reached the Illinois Supreme Court last week, claiming that Fillmore was placed in solitary for a year under the accusation of involvement with the Latin Kings gang, though the alleged evidence against him was never presented in his disciplinary hearing and Fillmore was not allowed to call any witnesses.

[According](#) to *Injustice Watch*, assistant attorney general Kaitlyn Chenevert did not deny that the hearing violated state regulations, but she said the policies served as a guidance, rather than a requirement, and do not confer any rights on incarcerated people. Fillmore's attorney said this argument sought limitless discretion for corrections officers, and incarcerated people should be allowed to enforce the few protections they have.

AL.com [reported](#) that U.S. District Court Judge Myron Thompson responded to lawyers request for an immediate halt to the placement of people with psychiatric disabilities in solitary by issuing an order for the Alabama Department of Corrections to provide a report with a list of people currently held in segregation with serious mental illnesses and the reason for their placement there. In his order, Thompson said that the request remains pending, though he previously stated that placement of people with psychiatric disabilities in solitary contributed to the skyrocketing number of suicides in Alabama prisons, which reached nine last year and two so far this year.

In a *KJZZ* [article](#), former correctional health care worker Jose Vallejo described his time working for the private company Corizon Health at the Special Management Unit (SMU-1) in the Eyman Prison Complex in Arizona. Vallejo was let go in December 2018 for filing a complaint about the lack of adequate staff training, the improper distribution of medication, and the detrimental effects of severe staffing shortages. Vallejo says that Corizon is just hiring bodies, trying to get their numbers up, though they still only reach 50 percent staff capacity in the maximum security SMU-1 unit, which [houses](#) seriously mentally ill people and people in protective custody. The lack of staff and lack of training creates room for medication errors which can ultimately kill them, depending on what you're giving them, said Vallejo.

WVTF [reported](#) that the Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC) has been using solitary confinement to inhibit incarcerated people's ability to express their political views, specifically in the cases of Dale Pughsley and Uhuru Rowe. After Pughsley began organizing other incarcerated people, he was sent to solitary confinement at Red Onion State Prison. He was later transferred to another prison far from his family after he circulated a petition calling for better medical care, an effective grievance procedure, clean water and more nutritious food. In Rowe's case, the VDOC prevented him from sending two essays expressing his critique of the prison system, which Rowe's lawyer says violates his 1st Amendment rights. Additionally, the VDOC has employed solitary at Sussex and Buckingham prisons allegedly for reasons of staffing shortages.

Valerie Kiebal 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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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