

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Born in California, Actions on the 23rd of Each Month Mark the 23 Hours a Day Spent in Isolation

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#) | October 23, 2015



At this moment, 80,000 to 100,000 people in the United States spend all but one or two hours a day locked in tiny, often windowless cells sometimes in complete darkness, sometimes in ceaseless artificial light. There they stay, for months, years, and even decades, with limited to no programming and virtually no human contact. This practice of long-term isolation has been labeled torture by the UN and is widely acknowledged to cause severe psychological pain and even permanent damage.

[No one is more knowledgeable](#) about the lasting damage solitary confinement can cause or passionate about the need to end the practice than the tens of thousands of men, women, and children experiencing it today. Building on the activism of these individuals, communities around the country are coming together to demand an end to long-term solitary confinement through monthly public events and actions. These coordinated actions take place nationwide on the 23rd of each month in recognition of the 23 hours per day those in solitary confinement are confined to their cells.

Together to End Solitary has its roots in California's [Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition](#), which began monthly actions to educate the public and protest solitary confinement based on [action proposals](#) by hunger strikers in solitary in the states Security Housing Units (SHUs) in 2013. The strength of the Coalition comes in large part from the courage, honesty, persistence, and unity of families in California. Inspired by the bravery and deep humanity shown by their incarcerated loved ones, California families came together to carry their voices beyond the prison walls. [Statewide Coordinated Actions to End Solitary Confinement](#), mobilized on the 23rd of each month, have been an important and unified way to bolster the prisoner-led movement for solitary confinement reform in California.

Every 23rd action in California promotes the [Agreement to End Hostilities](#). It's an historic call by California prisoners for all hostilities between our racial groups in SHU, Ad-Seg, General Population, and County Jails, [to] officially cease, and acts as a powerful foundation of unity in the movement for positive change in the states prison system. The Agreement, laid down by people locked in isolation for decades, helped mobilize over 30,000 people in California prisons to [hunger strike](#) in July 2013 to demand an end to solitary confinement. It remains a backbone of the movement for solitary reform in that state. As part of their monthly actions, [Santa Cruz](#) families coordinate a [Readers Theater](#) in which participants recite aloud from the Agreement.

Each month on the 23rd, San Diego families set up a [public display](#), inviting passersby to view photos of loved ones in isolation, engage in one-on-one conversation, and listen to a different truth than what media tells them.

In a particularly moving event, more than 70 family members came together in Norwalk, California on August 23rd for a candlelight vigil that included powerful personal testimonies, a mock solitary cell on display, voter registration forms, and a screening of [Breaking Down the Box](#). Copies of the film were handed out so people could show the film at their houses of worship. California Assembly

Member Christina Garcia attended the event and posted pictures to her Facebook page. Moved by the stories of separation and isolation, she stated that she didn't know this was happening and vowed to work hard for pending youth solitary legislation.

Members of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition and other participating groups say that the recent legal settlement, which will lead to at least 2,000 people being released from the states SHUs, is an important beginning but that the struggle needs to continue. Marie Levin of California Families Against Solitary Confinement, whose brother spent more than three decades in solitary, said We will be with the prisoners in the courts, in the legislature, and out in the community. We will use every venue available to us until the torture is ended.

In recent months, events have sprung up in New York City, Chicago, Boston, and on several college campuses. Organizers hope that activists including survivors and families, individuals and groups, students and faith leaders will join the national effort, [Together to End Solitary](#). To that end, they have launched a new website, with [resources](#) to help people start actions in their communities, as well as a list of [past](#) and [future](#) events and a space to [add event information](#). On social media, the campaign is using the hashtags #STOPsolitary #together.

Corrina Regnier is a Paralegal at the ACLU's National Prison Project. Verbena Lea is Executive Director of the Peoples Action for Rights and Community. Both are organizers in the Together to End Solitary campaign.

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

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It is fitting that California leads the way in finding the solution to long term solitary confinement by the parties at Pelican Bay forging this Agreement to End Hostilities since it was in the Californias prison yards that the hostilities first began in earnest. Everyone that has entered the U.S. prison system since the mid-1960s has been thrust into an ongoing conflict which forces everyone regardless of race to adjust to it. The history of our prison system is unique in this regard. It is about time the situation normalized and the prisoner class worked at bettering their shared environment. I wish them success.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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