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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | August 5, 2018

[According](#) to the *Associated Press*, lawyers for the Southern Center for Human Rights wrote a letter to Georgia corrections officials this week calling for an end to the states practice of releasing individuals directly from solitary confinement back into society. The lawyers, currently representing individuals held at the Special Management Unit (SMU) at the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Prison, cited a report from professor of psychology at University of California, Santa Cruz, Craig Haney, who wrote the SMU so severely and completely deprives prisoners of meaningful social contact and positive environmental stimulation that it puts them at significant risk of very serious psychological harm. (See the [related article](#) on Solitary Watch.) The lawyers letter said that releasing people directly from these conditions increases the likelihood of recidivism and poses a public safety risk. State lawyers claim they have begun to implement reforms at the SMU, such as transitional re-entry programs, mental health evaluations, and an incremental increase in out-of-cell time.

The Marshall Project [reported](#) on New Hampshire State Prisons Secure Psychiatric Unit (SPU), where mentally ill individuals at risk of self-harm or suicide are transferred from the New Hampshire Hospital. The hospital does not have a secure unit, so the only current route for placement with greater security needs is to be transferred to solitary confinement at the SPU, although they have no criminal charges against them. A man whose son with schizophrenia has been held in SPU for over a year says, Thats not a hospital, its a prison. Thats a hell in there. Despite several policy reports since 2004 providing the state with recommended alternatives to SPU, the state of New Hampshire has taken no steps to change the states policy of transferring civilly committed individuals to solitary confinement.

Minnesota NPR published an [article](#) on reforms to solitary confinement that have been implemented at the North Dakota State Penitentiary in Bismarck, after Leann Bertsch, the states director of Corrections and Rehabilitation, traveled to Norway on a trip organized by prison reform advocates. Some of the changes included eliminating punishment for certain minor infractions, positive behavior reports, mental health screenings, group therapeutic sessions, and programs for skill building. Since 2015, the state penitentiary has reduced its isolated population from 80 or 90 individuals to about 20. The reforms have received positive feedback from incarcerated individuals as well as prison officials. Warden Colby buy wyeth ativan Braun admitted, I was scared to death. I was scared for staff. I was scared for the facility. I was scared when we talked about specific guys leaving, and I was wrong.

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation has launched an investigation into WWE star Brian Christopher Lawlers death last week, while he was allegedly being held in solitary confinement at the Hardeman County Jail in Tennessee after being arrested for driving under the influence, driving on a revoked license, and evading arrest, [according](#) to *Yahoo! 7Sport*. The local county sheriff released a statement confirming, Mr. Lawler, because of his notoriety, was placed in a cell by himself but as the Sheriffs Department had no indication he was suicidal, he was not on suicide watch.

At CUNYs John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, Associate Professor Amy S. Green directed a [play](#) called *whatdoesfreemean?* written by Catherine Filloux. The play critiques the politics of punishment, racial disparity, and the effect of mass incarceration on women in the U.S. prison system, which she describes as a modern form of slavery. Green incorporated solitary confinement into the play after speaking with a group of formerly incarcerated women, who described their experiences in the Special Housing Unit (SHU). One of the plays main characters Mary feels the psychological effects of sensory deprivation in solitary confinement, after she was placed in SHU for trying to get medical attention for another incarcerated woman, who ended up dying before Mary got out of solitary.

A *New York Times* [article](#) discussed allegations of abuse, physical restraints, and solitary confinement at juvenile detention centers that have expanded to house immigrant children. Along with spit masks and a high, hard-backed metal chair with wheels, staff at the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center in Virginia have used solitary confinement on children, according to a recent class-action lawsuit against the facility. One migrant teenager, who had been previously diagnosed with a mental illness, said in the lawsuit, They locked me in a room that was 810, or maybe 816, for 23 hours a day, all by myself. Another lawsuit resulted in a judge ruling this week that immigrant children be transferred out of the Shiloh Treatment Center in Texas, where the deaths of three local children at the facility between 2001 and 2010 were found attributable to restraint holds.

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

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