

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Katie Rose Quandt](#) | August 19, 2019

In *Truthout*, Victoria Law [reports](#) on how solitary survivors are helping lead the fight to end solitary confinement in New Jersey, New York, Illinois, and throughout the country. In New Jersey, their efforts led to the recent passing of the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act, which limits solitary to 20 consecutive days and bans it entirely for certain vulnerable populations. Advocates have also pushed the issue of solitary confinement out of the shadows, making it a talking point for several Democratic presidential hopefuls.

Solitary survivor and advocate Five Omar Mualimm-Ak published a [joint op-ed](#) about suicide behind bars in *The Hill* with Homer Venters, the former chief medical officer at Rikers. Suicide is the leading cause of death in American jails, they wrote. Suicide in jail often reflects a lack of basic suicide prevention measures as well as practices that increase the likelihood of mental anguish and self-harm, including solitary confinement and forced withdrawal from opiate use.

The number of ICE detainees in solitary has risen 15.2 percent during the first 15 months of the Trump presidency, [reports](#) the Project on Government Oversight. The organization found that 40 percent of stays in solitary involved someone with a mental illness, and 61 percent of stays lasted 15 days or more, with some lasting months or over a year. Previous investigations into ICE facilities [uncovered](#) the fact that people were segregated due to physical disabilities or sexual orientation.

Advocates in DeKalb County, home of Atlanta, have held at least five protests this year over conditions at the DeKalb County Jail, [Atlanta Progressive News reports](#). Advocates allege that people incarcerated in the jail are not allowed to use the phone, the air conditioner does not work, and some are held in solitary confinement for no reason. One person wrote to advocates that the conditions in here are unlivable. When you inform the guards of the mold on the food, they act like it don't even exist! It took me two days without food just to eat it Please keep helping us, we dying in here!

In the early 2010s, civil rights attorney Anne Butterfield Weills worked on *Ashker v Governor of California*, a federal lawsuit that led to heavy restrictions on the use of solitary confinement in California's prisons. Now, [she alleges](#) in a lawsuit that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has retaliated by banning her for life from communicating with members of its incarcerated population, *The Mercury News* reports. In court filings, CDCR said Weills was banned not as retaliation, but for allegedly communicating with clients who were using a contraband cell phone.

Katie Rose Quandt is a senior contributing writer/editor at Solitary Watch and freelance journalist based in the Bronx. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, and *Mother Jones*. She is also a senior editor at the Prison Policy Initiative, and was an Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellow and Soros Justice Media Fellow. Find her [@katierosequandt](#) and at [katierosequandt.com](#).

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