

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 12, 2020

[According to the Washington Post](#), Senators Elizabeth Warren and Richard Durbin sent two letters to U.S. Attorney General William Barr and Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Director Michael Carvajal: one [condemning federal prisons reliance on solitary confinement](#) during the pandemic and the second [calling the BOP to act immediately to stop the spread of the virus](#). The Senators claim the BOPs response has left countless at-risk people vulnerable to contract the deadly disease and the use of solitary has exacerbated the spread of the virus. The federal Coleman prison in Florida has been holding sick people in the special housing units (SHU) but this failed to contain the virus. In July, a [report](#) from the Office of Inspector General on Federal Correctional Complex Lompoc in California found that sending people to solitary for contracting the virus could backfire by discouraging people from reporting symptoms. Only four percent of the BOP population has been released to home confinement since March. The senators called for the BOP to release more people. Every day that you fail to do so, more people are at risk, the senators wrote.

[PLOS One](#) health journal published the findings of a study by a team of academics, including Keramet Reiter from the University of California Irvine, on October 9. The article found that solitary confinement is associated not only with detrimental psychological effects but also harmful physical effects. And since solitary is used disproportionately against people of color, the damaging consequences of solitary are more likely to affect people of color. The study was based on a random sampling of incarcerated people in the Washington State Department of Corrections in 2017 and a survey of all those held in long-term solitary confinement in the state. The team concluded that three physical symptoms are most closely associated with time in solitary: (1) skin irritations and weight fluctuation, (2) un-treated and mis-treated chronic health conditions, and (3) musculoskeletal pain.

The *Sheboygan Press* [reported](#) that two in five incarcerated people at Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (KMCI) in Wisconsin are infected with the coronavirus, with over 600 incarcerated people having tested positive since early September. The prison has been locked down, forcing people to quarantine with their cellmates for 23 hours a day. Joseph Cook, held at KMCI, said the worst part is the lack of communication regarding the precautions. Nothing is clear. People are scared. People dont want to die, Cook said. Christina Prieto, whose husband contracted the virus at KMCI, said they were told theyd get new N95 masks every five days but her husband hasnt received one in over a month. According to the DOC website, the number of positive cases went from one in late June to 542 late September, but the DOC doesnt report the number of deaths due to privacy protections.

KQED [reported](#) that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities have been using solitary excessively since long before the pandemic, and now use solitary to quarantine people. Alton Edmonson, a Jamaican immigrant with three sons born in the U.S., tested negative for the virus but still, officials at the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center in California kept him locked in a cell 23 hours a day for three weeks, allegedly for his own protection. Edmonson said he was never given a reason why he could not reside in the dorm with other people who tested negative. Others in ICE facilities reported a similarly traumatic experience in solitary, including people with serious health issues. Edmonsons attorney, Trevor Kosmo, represented another man who committed suicide in solitary at Mesa Verde in May. Its completely inhumane to put people in a windowless room for 23 hours to quarantine them. If they cant properly quarantine them, they need to release everyone, Kosmo said.

The *Journal of Forensic Sciences* published a [letter to the editor](#) written by Harvard Professor of Medicine Pracha Peter Eamranond and Claire Shiple on the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of people in prison. The article argues that the failure of prisons to properly distinguish between conditions in punitive solitary confinement and medical separation has led to higher levels of anxiety and depression for incarcerated people and their communities. The authors call for access to resources, such as books, television, and family communication all of which are typically prohibited in solitary in order to alleviate the anxiety, and prisons should focus on addressing the cause of the anxieties. The current lack of mental health resources in prison contributes to the health disparity between communities of color and the white community, according to the article.

The *Texas Observer* published the [first finalist for its 2020 short story contest](#). In the story, Solitary, Dutch Simmons wrote about a time he spent in a 6-by-9 cell in solitary confinement. Thinking of his son and striving to be a role model for him, Simmons said he had intervened in a fight that could have ended fatally for another incarcerated man. That action broke the prisons rules, and Simmons ended up in solitary for it. Simmons wrote about the guilt that is a shadow during the day; my blanket at night. In prison, and especially in

solitary, Everything is your fault. Everything is punishable, wrote Simmons. In a note from Simmons about the piece, he recalled a time when he overheard a woman in the grocery store complaining about what its like to be in solitary confinement during quarantine. Triggered by her comment, Simmons explained, There are people in prison currently who have spent YEARS and DECADES in solitary who will never be able to function in society as we know it.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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Fci Phoenix: SHU Housing ENDING Admin Segregation. INMATES FEARFUL of OFFICERS retaliation NOW STUCK & unable to file grievances.

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