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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | January 11, 2021

The *Washington Post* [reported](#) that British District Judge Vanessa Baraitser blocked the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States, based on the high risk of suicide and self-harm he would face imprisoned in the U.S. Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, struggles with mental illness and is currently held in a British prison. Citing the conditions at the highly restrictive federal ADX supermax prison in Colorado, Baraitser said, I am satisfied the procedures described by the U.S. will not prevent Mr. Assange from finding a way to commit suicide and for this reason I have decided extradition would be oppressive by reason of mental harm. In 2017, 33 people committed suicide in federal custody in the U.S. In an [op-ed](#) in the *Guardian*, the ACLU National Prison Project Director David Fathi wrote, The courts ought to be as concerned about the treatment of the hundreds of thousands of people who were held in solitary last year as they are about this man with an international following.

[According to the Intercept](#), Advocate Visitors with Immigrants in Detention (AVID) and Innovation Law Lab [released a report](#) last week after inspecting the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Otero County Processing Center, located in New Mexico and operated by the Management and Training Corporation (MTC). The report claims that the oversight conducted by the Nakamoto Group, the company hired by ICE to inspect its detention centers, is an example of performative compliance, which means they not only fail to document problems but actively seek to give the illusion of complying with ICE standards. The AVID report found immigrants held in overcrowded hieleras, or iceboxes, for up to two months upon their arrival into ICE custody. Along with this clean torture tactic, immigrants held at Otero reported being sent to solitary confinement, being treated like animals, and facing psychological abuse often as retaliation for speaking out or contracting the coronavirus.

[According to the Arkansas Times](#), Disability Rights Arkansas and Decarcerate [released a report](#) on the use of solitary confinement in the Arkansas Department of Corrections (ADC). Based on data from the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) and the Liman Center at Yale Law School, in 2019, Arkansas prisons held eleven percent of its population in restrictive housing, or solitary confinement, while the national median was 3.8 percent. The data suggests that Arkansas holds people in solitary at the highest rate across the U.S. Black men and women as well as Hispanic women faced solitary at much higher rates. The report also found that ADC releases people directly from solitary confinement back to society, posing a significant risk for both the person re-entering society and the community. Seventy-three percent of people in solitary have been there for over six months, and some have been in solitary for six years.

WNYC [reported](#) that people held Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody in the Essex County Jail and Hudson County Jail in New Jersey have engaged in a hunger strike demanding their release as protection from the coronavirus. According to Legal Aid Society attorney Johanna Zacarias, hunger strikers were transferred to other facilities and sent to solitary confinement. That, I think, is potentially another tactic to try to break somebody participating in a hunger strike, said Zacarias. One of her clients at the Hudson County Jail was held in a cell without water or a functional toilet. ICE claims that the transfers were not punitive and that their placement in solitary confinement was for the immigrants own protection.

IDOC Watch published an [article](#) written by Kwame Beans Shakur held at Secured Housing Unit (SHU) at the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Indiana. The prison ceased visitation in March due to COVID, but while video visit kiosks seem to have been installed in all other units in the prison, those in the SHU have been completely denied contact with their loved ones for nine months. According to Shakur, The refusal to place kiosks on the SHU even prior to the pandemic is another form of sensory deprivation used to break the minds and spirits of those held in solitary confinement. Additionally, those held in the SHU are prohibited from purchasing commissary and do not receive the proper diet. Shakur said that 20 people held on the SHU at Wabash filed grievances demanding access to video visits.

WBFO [reported](#) that legislators and advocates held a news conference, calling for the passage of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act. The bill would ban the use of solitary confinement for longer than fifteen days across the state of New York, implement humane alternatives, and prohibit the use of solitary for people with disabilities, pregnant women, people younger than 21, and people older than 55. These are humans were talking about, said Melania Brown, the sister of Layleen Polanco, who died in solitary confinement on Rikers Island in 2019. Not even an animal deserves to be put in a cage for that amount of hours. Advocate

Sammie Werkheiser said that she was sent to solitary confinement while she was pregnant with twins. She gave birth at five months and her daughter did not survive.

Complex [reported](#) that Rashod Stanley, the founder of the Trenches clothing line, has been placed in solitary confinement in a after his video of a prison fashion show went viral. Stanley's mother said, My son was moved from Calhoun State Prison [in Georgia] and is currently being held in solitary confinement on Tier 2 at Macon State Prison for the prison fashion show video that went viral. Stanley had already spent 30 days in solitary for making the clothes featured in the video with dental floss and a paper clip. Now, Stanley faces nine months in solitary under a charge of attempting to aid in escape and altering state property. Stanley said he hopes to inspire other people with his clothing line to make something out of nothing.

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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