

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | April 7, 2014

The following comes from Joe (pseudonym), a minor who has been incarcerated since last summer, held in solitary confinement for over six months. In his letter to Solitary Watch, he describes his life on 23-hour-a-day lockdown in a jail where he has no access to any rehabilitation or other programs, classes or church. He recounts in detail in his letter the conditions to which he is exposed on a daily basis; the jail is windowless, without sunlight or fresh air. Joe talks about a waiver, by which, in this case, he means going before a judge, who, considering his age, will order he be treated as a minor.

Following Joe's letter is an inventory of grievances he prepared regarding the conditions he endures. His list states that, in this jail, which he describes as hot and filthy, he is on some days denied his hour out, refused any sort of mental health services, and is provided with no opportunities for outside recreation. He writes, Experiences like this, I promise you, I am never locking up an animal or anything living in a box, tank, or cage. Lisa Dawson



Waking up almost every day at around 2 or 3 am, the first thing I see is the wall my bed is connected to. When I see this, I sigh and say, I'm still here. Another day, is the only way I can put this without actually trying to calculate my last days. Oh, by the way, it's 23/1 lockdown where I am housed. That's the best they have for juveniles. I've been on lockdown for 7-1/2 months and counting. How do I do it? The strength of my almighty Father God, the support from my loved ones, and the determination to become something great. I can help other kids in my position.

I don't get any programs, school classes, or church, because I'm 17. Crazy, right? Well if you think that's crazy, check this out: the location in the jail I am housed in, there's no sunlight, no windows, no fresh air, and no outside rec. The only times I get to see the sun is on court dates (for about 10 minutes, altogether).

It's funny, because a lot of adults, grown men, who come in and out of jail/prison ask me, a 17-year-old kid, how I stay sane without my natural resources and on lockdown. It is what it is, is usually what I tell them.

Every day I'm in here, I try to plan my hour out of the cell: who am I going to call, how long will the call be, how long can I walk around, and how long will my shower take. Even when I get back to my cell, I plan: how long should I read this book, how long should I study the books a friend gave me, how long should I spend writing my life stories, how long will I draw, etc. If you try to read all day, you're setting yourself up for failure, because once you've finished the book(s), you have absolutely nothing to keep you occupied, and you slowly lose your mind. Many people would say sleep, ha! You can only sleep so much, and if you do sleep all day, the next day is going to be a long 23 hours for you.

It's amazing how the jail is getting away with this. Mind-blowing, really, because I'm a kid, surviving without my daily needs every day, while some adults can't even do this for one week.

So, I was arrested on August 13, 2013. My first waiver hearing was January 6, 2014. No one was ready, so it was postponed. Okay, cool. Another two months on lockdown; you can imagine my excitement. So the next waiver hearing is March 24, 2014. Now the excuse is

that the schedule was too packed in the courtroom to get to my case. Mind you, I was sitting in the courtroom for at least 45 minutes before the Judge came in. My public defender said, You're getting postponed. Again. Okay, now I'm immediately pissed, but I can't show it, so I'm clenching my jaw so hard I nearly draw blood. Then, to add insult to injury, he says that the next hearing date is June 11, 2014. Okay, pause, let me rephrase that. Got here August 13, 2013, been trying to get waived down, first hearing date January 6, 2014 is postponed, next date March 24, 2014 is postponed, and the next date, June 11, 2014 is yet to come, but keep this in mind I turn 18 on July 17, 2014. Now let me ask you, do you see what they're trying to do? They're trying to wait until I'm 18 so they can say, He's 18. We can't waive him down or whatever.

Yeah, but back to the jail. They open, scan, and reseal outgoing mail, and, of course, the same for incoming mail. Then, for visiting, you get one 30-minute visit per week, and depending on who's working that day, you might not get your entire 30 minutes.

Next up, the medical staff. I had heart surgery when I was an infant, tricuspid atresia was the name of the operation. Ever since I can remember, I've had to take medicine. I take Bayer aspirin and Enalapril daily, to keep my blood thin through my veins and arteries. So, for about 2-1/2 months, I wasn't getting them here. I asked about it almost daily, and I always got the I'll check response. Then one day, I suffered from a really bad head and stomach pain, and had to go to medical. After we talked about what was wrong, they asked if I took meds (should have known the answer to that; they're medical). I told them I was supposed to be taking my heart meds, and when she pulled the charts, she said, Oh well. No one renewed the prescription for 2 months. Don't worry; we'll renew it. All I could say was wow.

Next subject, my cell. The worst part about this cell is the dust. There's two vents in here, one that blows dirty air and one that circulates the air poorly. There's so much dust in the vents, if I tap on them, I damn near have an asthma attack..

Experiences like this, I promise you, I am never locking up an animal or anything living in a box, tank, or cage.

All in all, this is my world at this point in my life. I deal with it every day. This all for a kid whose 10th grade classes consisted of honors English 10, AP world history, French III, Spanish I, trigonometry, Honors chemistry, dance, Honors biology, and foundations of technology. It is what it is. I just have to stay strong and live my life to the fullest; and as of now, that's reading and increasing my English and writing attributes. This and more, from America's Secrets Exposed. Good day, citizens.

Inventory of Grievances

Terrible medical staff (I can elaborate on this boys given the wrong medications, not given needed medications, etc.)
23/1 lockdown

Juveniles are not allowed razors for shaving; have to use head clippers

No education until you are 18

No counseling or other programs until you are 18

No church until you are 18

Segregated from everything

Get denied phone time

Some days, they don't pull me out for my hour

Going off is the only way to get something

Because I'm young, they don't take me seriously

Had to have my people spend money for educational books, because the jail doesn't provide them

Librarian rarely comes; if I try to keep extra books, they take them

When you put in a slip to speak to someone, it goes unanswered

No exercise equipment or outdoor rec

No sunlight

No fresh air

They never clean the vents

Because we are over the laundry room, we get fumes that make you dizzy

Supervisors that don't do shit

They lose/almost lose possessions

They open court mail before they are in front of me

The lights never go out

We go to court, sit in the bullpen, and visit with adults, and we are housed with adults, but we can't be out with them

No fruit whatsoever

When I wash my clothes, they always come back damp

T-Block is the dustiest place in the jail

Also used as the intake area people come in here straight off the streets, coughing and throwing up

Always hot

Gave me a job, but never let me out to do it

Because I am locked down, I had to start taking anxiety pills (this is true for many of the boys)

They hold my mail

They give me pills I don't need, and for almost 2 months, I wasn't getting pills I need (medication for a heart condition)

I had to use the same contact lens solution for almost 3 weeks, even though I kept asking for more of the solution my family had brought in.

Sometimes they cut my hour short (time out of the cell)

The boy who does not speak English is routinely skipped over for time out of his cell, and they don't give him anything (I am hoping to get a list from him)

Maintenance never fixes anything

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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I am amending my comment directly above to add that I am referring to lock up IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT!

It is absolutely inhumane to lock up an individual for 23-24 hours per day, each week, each month, each year, each decade. Why do we as a society do this? Its torturous. Its mean.

The story says he is in jail, not prison. That would indicate that he has not been found guilty of any crime. He is, I would have to assume, a minor charged as an adult. That would also explain the reason for his segregation. In my state of MD, children can be charged as adults, and then held in an adult jail for months and years, before ever going to trial. For some of these kids, charges are eventually dropped altogether, but the damage has already been done. For others, their cases may eventually be waived down to the juvenile court, but again, the damage has already been done. This boy seems to indicate that he will have waited for almost a year, in segregation in an adult jail, before ever getting a chance to have his case waived back to the juvenile system.

I could not guess what this boy might be charged with, but the fact is that there are likely adults within that jail who are charged with the same crime, and who are not held in such extreme circumstances. That is, I believe, the injustice here. Why should a child be treated more harshly than an adult, and denied even the limited rights that are afforded to adults? And why is he held without access to education or church? How can that help anybody? This boy will one day be released into society. Do you want him living next door to you, having suffered such trauma at the hands of our government, and without having had access to any of the services that might have helped to rehabilitate him (if, in fact, he is in need of rehabilitation)?

I can certainly understand the harsh conditions that this young man is having to endure. He is very specific and detailed in his descriptions. I for one would appreciate if these inmates submitting these grievances would also convey and disclose the crimes or actions that placed them in their current predicament. Specifically, what were your crimes, how are your victims coping with the trauma you caused in their lives. Did you show them compassion and consideration. I believe it is only fair to present the issues that put you there and the treatment you are now receiving. Now you are requesting to be treated fairly. Prior to your incarceration did you not know where you may end up by committing crimes. I believe you did know, but it wasn't a strong enough deterrent to keep you law abiding. Now you are using the fact that you are a juvenile and you should not be treated as an adult. Were the crimes you committed of an adult nature. I read a comment indicating that our country is at fault and should not be incarcerating our kids, or teenagers. What is unfortunate is that our kids and teenagers are committing very serious crimes up to murder. I believe as a civilized society we should definitely concentrate our effort on educating, counseling and mentoring our young people away from drugs, gangs and violence. Maybe when this young man is released he will devote some time to convey to his peers his experiences in hopes of preventing them from experiencing incarceration as well. Any person that is incarcerated and is experiencing unlawful treatment or is having their rights violated can petition their local superior court with jurisdiction over the institution and request relief. If you are held passed your eighteenth birthday it still will not change the fact of your age at the time the crime was committed. Behave now, get out and don't commit any more crimes.

why wasn't the youngster bonded out ????? what's the alleged crime ???? could be he has ineffective counsel before I'll jump in and say this is sad-I gotta have more facts.

It is sad that the greatest county in the world can lock up its children in solitary confinement. This is barbaric and inhumane. How do we get this stopped?

This happens to all children charged as adults. Some of them are in protective custody solitary confinement for years waiting for a trial to even get convicted. If they are innocent the feeling is so sad, but no one makes changes to his outrageous inhumane treatment. Our children need us to use our voices for them.

This is outrageous! Thanks for all you do, Jim.

Do you lose all your rights when incarcerated? Doesn't he have the right to a clean cell, access to a minister, and educational books? I oppose solitary confinement of our people.

It is agonizing to personally feel powerless to help this beautiful soul. I will keep remembering to send him good vibes, instead of only the anguish of the inhumanity shown him.

I think they put kids in lockdown to seperate them from the adults supposedly for their own safety. Must be a better way. This is just sick.

My question is why is he on lock-down?

Awesome I GUESS THAT IS MY SON CAUSE HE SAYS MOM IM FINE.YOU HAVE TO DO THE TIME NOT LET THE TIME DO YOU..STAY STRONG BUDDY..GOD BLESS JESUS IS WITH YOU ALLWAYS

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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