

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](#) | November 26, 2017

The Salem News [reported](#) that in Massachusetts, where individuals can currently be kept in solitary confinement for up to 10 years, the House and Senate have both approved a criminal justice bill that includes new restrictions on the use of solitary in state prisons. The bill requires the approval of a new segregation review board and oversight committee to hold people in solitary for more than 180 days or more than six times a year; mandates mental health assessments before placement in solitary and limits the time people with mental illness can be isolated; requires more humane conditions in solitary confinement cells, including light, ventilation, and toilets; and calls for greater reporting and transparency on the use of solitary. Once the differences between the House and Senate versions have been resolved, the bill will be sent to Governor Charlie Baker.

The Baltimore Sun published an [editorial](#) discussing the death of 29-year-old Emily Butler, who committed suicide in her solitary confinement cell at the Maryland women's prison in Jessup last week. Corrections officials say Butler had been held at the facility since 2014, but they could not give a reason for her transfer to solitary from general population and could not say how long she had been held in solitary confinement. The editorial asserts that solitary confinement may have been the catalyst for her death, based on the severe psychological effects often experienced in isolation, and calls for Maryland to rethink its use of solitary confinement in order to prevent further deaths. Four out of four of the suicides in the Maryland prison system this year have taken place in solitary confinement.

Common Dreams [reprinted](#) a press release from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), which recently filed a motion claiming that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has violated the terms of 2015 settlement in *Ashker v. Governor of California*, which mandated changes to the state's solitary confinement policies. The motion calls for extended federal court supervision, based on CDCR's failure to provide the required recreation and interaction for those in solitary confinement, denial of work and educational programs, indefinite placement in solitary without recourse, use of unsubstantiated gang validation policy, and continued infliction of severe psychological damage. The incarcerated individuals represented in the settlement expressed urgency for the changes to be implemented. We must stand together, one said, not only for ourselves, but for future generations of prisoners, so that they don't have to go through the years of torture that we had to.

Terry Poole, a man held in solitary confinement at Lanesboro Correction Institution in Anson County, North Carolina, committed suicide last week. *The Charlotte Observer* [reported](#) that in the past two years North Carolina has seen an increase in suicides by incarcerated individuals, from three in 2015 to seven in 2016 and five so far this year. Despite prison officials' initiation of a suicide prevention plan last year to better train staff in handling individuals at risk of suicide, critics question whether prison officials properly treat and monitor at-risk individuals. Other problems in the state's prison system identified by the *Observer* include chronic understaffing, endemic staff corruption, and high levels of violence.

AL.com published an [article](#) written by the chair of the Board of Directors of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Alan Howard, detailing the increase, under the Trump administration, in mistreatment of immigrants by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents, including failure to protect due process rights, inadequate medical and mental health care, and physical and sexual abuse. Howard explained that when individuals complain of the abuse they experience, they are often punished with solitary confinement. U.S. Rep. Adam Smith (D, WA) introduced the Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act of 2017 last month, calling for humane treatment of immigrants in custody and increased oversight.

Connecticut State Department of Correction Commissioner Scott Semple has begun to modify the approach to juvenile correction in Connecticut, based on his trip to Neustrelitz Prison in Mecklenburg, Germany in June 2015, led by the Vera Institute of Justice. *The New Haven Independent* [reported](#) successful results from the recent TRUE program (Truthfulness, Respectfulness, Understanding and Elevating) at Cheshire Correctional Institution, which Semple modeled after programs in the German prison that implemented minimum-wage employment, communication between staff and youth, and outlets for self-expression, instead of using solitary confinement for young people. Semple claimed, We are the model in the United States right now. We're one of the few states in the country that has lowered its incarceration rate, and were beginning to see a reduction in recidivism.

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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