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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 [Lizzie Kane](#) | February 1, 2021

The [Atlantic published the first article](#) in what will be a five-part series by Solitary Watch's Jean Casella, Katie Rose Quandt, and Sarah Shourd, on the epidemic of deaths in U.S. jails. The article, written by Shourd, tells the story of two families in California who called the police for help when their sons were experiencing mental health crises; only one of the young men survived. Shourd's piece examines how America's jails have become death traps for people with psychiatric disabilities, and why and how we can do better. Six months, a year, a bereaved father tells her, you'll be interviewing someone else because their son passed away in that jail.

In [The Bulwark](#), Keith Osmun writes about the lack of communication channels between family members and their incarcerated loved ones in Ohio, who are enduring especially poor conditions due to the pandemic. One family member whose husband is incarcerated is quoted saying: He had symptoms for two days. Because he had no fever, they wouldn't test him for COVID. I had to beg him to tell them because they get put in the hole [solitary confinement] for 14 days with no medical care. If he's sent to solitary, there are three outcomes: he'll get sicker, go critical and go to the hospital, die alone, or recover. Corrections officers are also getting sick and dying from COVID-19. So far just six states are prioritizing vaccinating both incarcerated people and prison staff, while others are solely prioritizing staff.

[The Daily Voice reports](#) that New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy ordered an investigation after allegations of abuse at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women were brought to light. Thirty-one staff members were suspended following an incident on January 11 in which officers in riot gear allegedly beat handcuffed women who were being held in solitary confinement. Advocates and family members said that the incident left one woman with a broken eye socket and another woman, who is transgender, in a wheelchair. According to the [New York Times](#), the NJ Assembly announced that it would hold hearings on the widespread abuse and use of force at the prison, which has a history of sexual assault and other abuse by staff.

[According to WZTV in Nashville](#), Representative Jesse Chism (D-Memphis) is advocating for limiting the use of solitary confinement for pregnant women and for children. He introduced bills HB0222 and HB0223, which would enact a Tennessee law that states: Solitary confinement is prohibited for pregnant inmates and inmates who have given birth within the past eight (8) weeks regardless of whether the purpose of confinement is for punishment or safekeeping. Chism also wants tighter restrictions for when juveniles are placed in solitary confinement, after other options have been exhausted, as well as additional juvenile-specific training for justice system employees and weekly reports sent to a judge for review if a child is in solitary.

[In a report for the Texas Public Policy Foundation](#), Marc Levin reports that people in Texas prisons have lengthier stays in solitary confinement than those incarcerated in other states, even though fewer people overall are being sent to solitary in Texas than in the past. He suggests that the state pursue less damaging alternatives to prolonged solitary confinement, including the expansion of efforts to gradually step down individuals in long-term isolation to a lower custody level while also increasing the use of technology to provide educational programming for those who remain in solitary confinement.

[The Appeal](#) asked formerly incarcerated people and civil rights advocates for their opinions on who the Biden-Harris administration should choose to lead the federal Bureau of Prisons. Several noted that conditions in the nation's largest prison system have further deteriorated during the Trump administration. They hope for someone who is a BOP outsider, prioritizes human rights, and has public health expertise. Activist Faisal Mualim suggested psychologist Craig Haney, who has studied and spoken out on the detrimental health effects of incarceration and solitary confinement. The use of solitary by the BOP has increased significantly in the past four years after falling somewhat during the Obama administration, and the Biden-Harris platform included a pledge to work toward an end to nearly all uses of solitary.

Lizzie Kane was an intern for Solitary Watch in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. Her work has also appeared in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Dallas Morning News, and Charlotte Observer.

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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