

# 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](#) | June 10, 2019

*The Nation* published an [article](#) exposing the force-feeding conducted by the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) on the H Unit at the U.S. Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility (ADX) in Florence, Colorado. Through several extensive interviews with men formerly held on the unit, author Aviva Stahl found that the men many of whom were Muslims and had been convicted of terrorism-related charges had gone on hunger strike in protest of the severely isolating conditions on the unit, specifically for those held under Special Administrative Measures (SAMs). Mohammed Salameh, for instance, engaged in hunger strikes year after year protesting the heavy restrictions on his communications, and according to Salameh, he faced brutal force-feeding 220 times. Salameh described in detail the procedure that the BOP claims to use to monitor the health and welfare of inmates and preserve life. But what Salameh described caused him excessive pain and aimed at ending his protest. While the World Medical Association has deemed force-feeding unethical and the United Nations considers the practice cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, Stahl says the practice continues to occur in U.S. prisons and remains largely unchallenged.

*Cleveland.com* [published](#) the video of an incident on July 16, 2018 in which Cuyahoga County jail officers in Ohio restrained Chantelle Glass in a chair, punched her in the face, and pepper-sprayed her at close range for six seconds. Glass was being held for failing to show up to court for a traffic ticket and claims she was restrained because she persistently demanded to make a phone call. While documents claim Glass was subsequently treated, Glass claims that despite her asthma, officers did not provide treatment after she was pepper sprayed, but instead, left her isolated in a room for two hours by herself after pouring water on her. Glass's attorney described the video as a torture scene. The jail supervisor has been charged with a second-degree felony assault and a second officer has been charged with a misdemeanor assault.

[According](#) to *Fast Company*, New York House Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez condemned the likely placement of Paul Manafort in solitary confinement. It is expected the former Trump campaign manager will be isolated in protective custody once he reaches Rikers Island jail in New York City. In a tweet, Ocasio-Cortez said, A prison sentence is not license for gov torture and human rights violations. That's what solitary confinement is. Manafort should be released, along with all people being held in solitary. In [another tweet](#), Ocasio-Cortez explained that protective custody does not necessarily exclude solitary. If he is in fact not being held in solitary, great. Release everyone else from it, too.

The *Miami New Times* told the [story](#) of 33-year-old Karamjit Singh, who was on vacation in Florida when an altercation led him to get picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and sent to the Glades County Detention Center. Singh says the facility is like a modern-day concentration camp, where he is experiencing psychological torture. When Singh expressed symptoms of his clinical depression, instead of receiving any type of mental health care, he says he was brought to a suicide watch cell, stripped naked, and placed in a Velcro straightjacket, where he remained for up to twenty hours. Singh says he was not previously suicidal but since his experience at the facility, he is now. Recent reports revealing ICE's frequent use of solitary confinement have shown that Singh is not alone in facing isolation at an immigration detention center.

*NJTV News* [published](#) footage of the New Jersey Senate Law and Public Safety Committee hearing on the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act, which would limit the use of solitary confinement to fifteen days at a time and ban the use of solitary for vulnerable populations. While the New Jersey Department of Corrections claims it does not use solitary, the video showed several survivors of solitary confinement providing testimony at the hearing of their time in isolation in New Jersey prisons. One survivor, Nafeesah Goldsmith said, I can name the names of the people screaming saying, I'm gonna kill myself, and the two people who were successful in killing themselves. The New Jersey State Assembly is currently drafting a solitary confinement bill to match the Senate's.

The *Marshall Project* published an [article](#) discussing the ongoing crisis in Pennsylvania, and across the country, of jails warehousing people with mental illness while they wait for mental health treatment. In one case, a woman identified by the pseudonym Elle remains in jail for minor crimes she committed likely due to her severe mental illness, and has been judged incompetent to stand trial. But since she is an adult, her family has been essentially prohibited from helping Elle get the treatment she needs. Spending years in jail, including time in solitary, Elle's symptoms had gotten worse, and her mother said, They are destroying my child. My biggest fear is that she may never recover. People with mental illness currently wait an average of 24 days in jails to receive mental health care for them to reach

competency to stand trial, but the ACLU of Pennsylvania has called for a limit of seven days, claiming, based on federal precedent, that anything longer violates the individuals rights.

At a time when the number of migrants encountered or arrested at the US-Mexico border has reached 144,000 the highest number in the past thirteen years immigration detention facilities have repeatedly faced condemnation from inspectors for their unlivable conditions. The new Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) director said that the administration is in the middle of a breaking point, [according](#) to CBS Denver. The latest inspection last month found dangerous overcrowding at the El Paso ICE facility in Texas, and U.S. Rep. Jason Crow found disturbing conditions in a visit to the ICE facility in Aurora, Colorado. A previous Department of Homeland Security inspection found misuse of solitary confinement and nooses hanging from vents in fifteen cells at the Adelanto ICE facility in California.

*The Washington Spectator* published an [article](#) about what one psychologist called the psychiatric-industrial complex, examining the case of the Coalinga State Hospital in California, where men convicted of sex-offenses remain incarcerated beyond their prison sentences. While the men held in the hospital supposedly await another trial to determine if they should be released or civilly committed, in most cases at Coalinga, the trials have been delayed years or even decades. As Californias Department of State Hospitals has allegedly silenced data disproving high recidivism rates of sex offenders, Coalingas arguably inflated budget continues to see an increase in funding from legislators, ultimately ending up in the pockets of administrators, staff, and contractors. The hospital reportedly faced lockdown last year, and two men incarcerated at Coalinga recalled stories of retaliation, including the use of isolation, in order to prevent them from exposing the operations of the hospital.

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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P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

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