

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/pope-francis-solitary-confinement-torture>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Ever since smoke rose from the Sistine Chapel heralding Pope Francis as leader of the Roman Catholic Church, he has made headlines for addressing controversial social issues. So, it was no surprise when he recently discussed mass incarceration, he did it with the gusto politicians have never been unable to muster. Pope Francis [called on](#) All Christians and people of good will to fight for the improvement of prison conditions in respect for the human dignity of those who have been deprived of liberty. He went on to speak out against solitary confinement, calling it torture.

There are lots of names for solitary confinement, restrictive housing, local control, administrative segregation, but they mean the same thing: extreme isolation. Learn more about the ACLU's campaign, [Smart Justice, Fair Justice](#), to end mass incarceration.

When we deprive people of their liberties, we have the upmost responsibility to ensure the system is fair and that its rehabilitative. Solitary confinement is neither. There are lots of names for solitary confinement: restrictive housing, local control, administrative segregation, but they mean the same thing: extreme isolation. Isolation means spending 22 to 24 hours a day in a room the size of a parking space with limited access to reading material, TV, or radio. You are outside only when weather permits and only for an hour a day, alone. While in solitary confinement, almost all human contact happens while in restraints or in a barrier. In Ohio's supermax prison in Youngstown, it happens in a cage that measures only a few square feet. Research has repeatedly [shown](#) that individuals placed in solitary confinement exhibit negative psychological reactions, including severe and chronic depression, paranoia, perceptual distortions, and hallucinations. They have difficulties with concentration, memory, and experience irrational rage. The effects of solitary on people with mental illness are exacerbated even further. Nearly every federal court to hear a case [has found](#) placing those with severe mental illness in solitary is cruel and unusual punishment. We know isolating someone is not rehabilitative. Many, including Pope Francis, consider it torture. Then why is Ohio still using this practice? Although the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction has kept rehabilitation in its name, it's time to recognize that little rehabilitation happens while in isolation.

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