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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 [Valerie Kiebala](#) | September 24, 2020

[According](#) to *My Twin Tiers*, five people held at the Allegheny County Jail filed a lawsuit through the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC) and the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, claiming that the conditions at the facility violate their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the 14th Amendment. The ALC conducted a survey of people held at the jail, finding that over a quarter of those interviewed were forced into a restraint chair or faced disciplinary retribution, including stun guns, pepper spray, and solitary confinement, instead of mental health treatment. One man with mental illness, Shaquille Howard, [said](#) he spent more than half his time at the jail in about 23 hours a day in a tiny, dirty, concrete cell, with little to no opportunity for human interaction, exercise or recreation. The lawsuit seeks class action status and asks for adequate mental health care and an end to the use of solitary confinement in response to mental illness or requests for mental health help.

CT Mirror [reported](#) that the Connecticut Department of Corrections (CDOC) has announced it will no longer send sick people to the supermax Northern Correctional Institution. Claudine Fox with the ACLU of Connecticut described the prison as known for inflicting human misery and suffering. The ACLU has sued the CDOC twice for mishandling the pandemic and Fox credited this policy shift to pressure from incarcerated people and family members who have spoken out. Since March, the CDOC has transferred over 600 people to Northern, and more than three-quarters of those people were Black or Latino. While it is good news that the DOC will no longer send sick people to Northern, Fox said, it never should have sent them there to begin with and the best way to protect incarcerated people from COVID-19 remains releases. The CDOC has opened a medical isolation unit in the MacDougall-Walker Correction Institution.

WABI5 [reported](#) that the Maine Supreme Court is reviewing the case of 44-year-old Douglas Burr, who is serving 59 years in prison and spent 22 months in solitary confinement at Maine State Prison. A lower court ruled that his time in solitary violated his civil rights but that the court did not have the authority to make a ruling affecting the prisons policy. Defense lawyer Eric Mehnert explained that Justice Murphy determined that no one in Burrs position could know what it was he or she had to do to leave the highly restrictive confinement imposed upon on him given the processes in place at the prison. Burr appealed the lower courts decision and the Maine Supreme Court has not announced when it will decide the case.

The *Hartford Courant* published an [interview](#) with Albert Woodfox, author of the memoir *Solitary* who spent over 44 years in solitary confinement at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. Asked why he thinks the prison put him and the other Angola Three in solitary confinement for decades despite their innocence, Woodfox said, We were members of the Black Panther Party. Woodfox discussed the impact racism had on his life before and during incarceration as well as his thoughts on the Black Lives Matter movement in this current political moment. Since his release in 2016, Woodfox has traveled all around the United States and Europe sharing his experiences in life and incarceration. This year, his book won the prestigious Harriet Beecher Stowe award.

At Chippewa Correctional Facility in Michigan, an incarcerated man fell unconscious when an officer used a Taser on him to stop a fight, [according](#) to CBS Detroit. Later that night, 40 incarcerated people surrounded the guard station in protest and, according to Michigan Department of Corrections spokesman Chris Gautz, they made a mess of the unit, destroyed equipment, threw papers everywhere, broke glass, flooded areas. In response, an emergency response team of officers from other prisons, state police, and U.S. Border Patrol came to lockdown the incarcerated protestors, who will all be transferred to maximum security prisons. Earlier this year at the prison, Edward Terrell Walton was sent to solitary confinement, accused of inciting a riot, after he spoke out about abusive and inhumane conditions in a letter, according to family members.

Jurist [reported](#) that advocates gathered to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the Attica prison uprising on September 13 and bring attention to the current conditions across the New York state prison system. During the historic 1971 uprising at Attica Correctional Facility, incarcerated people took control of the prison for five days calling for improved conditions, though state police ultimately took back control. Ten prison guards, one state trooper, and 33 incarcerated people died. Last week, advocates and formerly incarcerated people called for change, including an end to solitary, expanded parole for elderly people, and protection of transgender people. The protestors called for the passage of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, which would ban the use of solitary for longer than 15 days. International standards have declared any period of solitary longer than 15 consecutive days to be torture.

Valerie Kiebal 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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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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