

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 23, 2020

The *Boston Globe* [reported](#) that the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. attorneys office conducted an investigation, finding reasonable cause to believe that the Massachusetts Department of Correction (MDOC) has been violating the rights of people with mental health conditions by failing to provide them with proper care. MDOC has been placing people in prolonged mental health watches during psychological crises, according to Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Andrew E. Lelling. Elizabeth Matos with Prisoners Legal Services of Massachusetts said that mental health watch is widely considered worse than solitary confinement. Since 2018, eight people in MDOC custody died by suicide, four of whom were either on mental health watch or had been on mental health watch in the days leading up to their deaths. The investigators laid out the necessary changes for MDOC to implement by January 5, 2021 otherwise they may face a government lawsuit.

The *Guardian* published an [article](#) about the mistreatment of people held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody at the La Palma Correctional Center in Arizona, operated by the private prison company CoreCivic. Immigrants had already reported sexual abuse, isolation, and retaliation at the ICE facility, but the conditions only became worse under COVID-19. While an October ruling forced ICE to differentiate between medical isolation and solitary, Eunice Cho from the ACLU National Prison Project said they have seen a tremendous use of abuse of solitary confinement where people are not being told about their health status. ICE claims to use administrative segregation as a protective measure for LGBTQ+ people, but Lynly Egyes, the legal director of the Transgender Law Center, said, When a person is detained for 23 hours a day and their only interaction is when someone hands them their meal, that is solitary confinement. ICE can dress it up in whatever they want. The reality is solitary confinement and administrative segregation is the same thing.

The *Westerly Sun* [reported](#) that Sarah Eagan, the Connecticut child advocate, issued a report last week, concluding that lockdowns at the Manson Youth Institution during the pandemic left youth in solitary confinement for months. Eagan said, Locking anybody up, much less adolescents, 18 hours or 23 hours a day, day after day, week after week, month after month, wreaks havoc with everything from their cognitive development to their physical development to their mental health. While Eagan found mental health workers did tours of the units, providing mental health care through a cell window is not providing mental health care. That has to change, Eagan said. She called on the department to consider making more changes, such as increasing recreation time.

WNYT [reported](#) that Rashad Givhan, held at Greene Correctional Facility in New York, was placed in solitary confinement after his wife Alaina Givhan spoke with the media on camera about flawed COVID-19 measures at the prison. According to his wife, Givhan was locked in an administrative segregation cell for 23 hours a day for nearly four weeks. While the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) claimed Givhan's hearing was pushed back because they were unable to reach Givhan's lawyer, the Prisoners Rights Project said they have no record of the prison attempting to contact his attorney. But last week, Givhan was given a hearing where the Chief Hearing Officer determined that the individual would be released from Administrative Segregation and will be placed back into general population.

RVA Magazine [reported](#) that nearly every jail in the Richmond, Virginia area has faced a coronavirus outbreak, including the Chesterfield County Jail, Henrico Jail, Richmond City Jail, and the Pamunkey Regional Jail. At the Richmond City Jail (RCJC), the response has largely been lockdowns. Gilberto Dejesus, held at RCJC, refused to go into his cell for fear of spreading the virus, after officials moved him from a COVID-positive pod to a COVID-negative one. After others followed Dejesus in protest, officers used gas grenades and tear gas on the entire pod and sent Dejesus to solitary confinement, where he sat naked for days. He soon tested positive for the coronavirus. Angelo Long, also held at RCJC, was sent to solitary for a week, after criticizing the jail's COVID response.

The University of Texas at Austin published a report, entitled, [COVID, Corrections, and Oversight Project](#), examining the various strategies that oversight organizations have used to monitor the conditions of prisons and jails during the pandemic. The report laid out several recommendations for oversight bodies facing the challenges of monitoring correctional facilities during the pandemic: encourage prisons to publish daily statistics about COVID, encourage officials to regularly brief family members, develop safety plans for site visits, establish a free hotline for incarcerated people, stay in contact with families, establish confidential communication with staff, obtain surveillance footage, consider virtual inspections, collaborate with health authorities, and more. While on-site visits provide the

most reliable sources of information, the report pointed out that COVID has created opportunities to expand oversight methodologies and relationships with corrections agencies.

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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