

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Aviva Stahl](#) | November 2, 2014



The following roundup features noteworthy news, reports and opinions on solitary confinement from the past week that have not been covered in other Solitary Watch posts.

A federal appeals court [heard arguments](#) on whether the state of Virginia violated the Constitution by automatically placing those who have been given the death penalty in solitary confinement. Last January, a district court judge found that this automatic placement violated inmates due process rights.

[The Washington Post](#) published another editorial condemning the use of solitary confinement, concluding that prisons should isolate inmates only in rare cases when that is the singular way to prevent violence. The General Assembly should ensure that Maryland abides by this principle, rather than hiding behind euphemisms.

The family of a woman who passed away in a solitary confinement cell in Montana [must be paid \\$565,500, a District Court ruled](#). Heather Holly Wasson was 31 when she died of an alcohol withdrawal seizure; the jails staff was aware she was at risk and was supposed to put her on 30-minute review watch, but failed to do so.

Solitary Watch's Vikki Law published [a profile](#) of several mothers responsible for spearheading California Families Against Solitary Confinement. The organization has played a primary role in advocating for those locked up in isolation in California, including publicizing voices from the inside during the 2011 hunger strike.

The family of Jermon Murdough, who died in solitary confinement while on Rikers Island last winter, [will receive a \\$2.25 million settlement](#) from the City of New York. Murdough was a homeless veteran with a history of mental illness; he passed away after the temperature in his jail cell exceeded 100 degrees.

[The Salt Lake Tribune](#) published a letter by the Legal Director of the Disability Law Center, in which he addresses the recent suicide of a client held at Utah State Prison. Between 2011 and 2013 Ryan Allison spent over 586 days in punitive isolation, despite having a diagnosed mental illness and extensively documented suicide attempts and self-harm incidents.

[A class action lawsuit has been in federal court](#) to challenge the practice of applying owed bing time on Rikers Island. Currently, individuals held at the jail can be sent to solitary confinement for disciplinary infractions committed during previous detentions.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. Shes written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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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I befriended Ryan Allison over the last two years. He wrote me when another prisoner at USP gave him my address. I enjoyed Ryan's friendship and cared about him. I received a letter from him on October 4th. He shared something important with me. I immediately wrote him back. It was imperative that Ryan get this letter because he feared I would abandon him. To my disgust, the prison rejected my letter because I had drawn a sun with a smiley face on the envelope. I had sent many letters to that prison with this same drawing with no problem. I was outraged and called the prison and told them I knew this letter was rejected as a way to harass Ryan. I quickly re-sent my letter, but he didn't get it. It haunts me to think if Ryan thought I had abandoned him before he took his life.

My Name is Jamie. Life in Prison. mynameisjamie.net. How many times do things like this have to happen before prisons and the corporations that own them be held accountable? Winter is setting in. Being too cold is hard to deal with. Summers in extreme heat. How many people have to die? Aging populations without adequate medical care. These are people! How can they be allowed to get away with the things they do?

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