

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/addressing-the-overuse-of-segregation-in-u-s-prisons-and-jails/new-blog-series-addressing-the-overuse-of-segregation-in-u-s-prisons-and-jails>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Segregation, also referred to as solitary confinement or restricted housing, is a practice widely used in U.S. prisons and jails. The number of people held in segregated housing is estimated to be [as high as 80,000 to 100,000](#).

There is increasing evidence that such solitary confinement produces unwanted and harmful outcomes for the mental and physical health of those in isolation, the well-being of staff, facility safety, corrections budgets of jurisdictions that rely on the practice, and the public safety of the communities to which most will return. In recent years, concern has grown about the overuse of segregation. Public figures from President Barack Obama to Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy have expressed concern about this practice, and the Association for State Correctional Administrators has called for a reduction in its use.

Many corrections leaders are at the forefront of reform efforts across the country. In 2014 alone, 10 states announced or implemented policy changes to reduce the number of people held in segregated housing, improve conditions in segregation units, or facilitate the return of segregated people to a prisons general population. Some jurisdictions have already implemented these types of reforms, with encouraging results.

Since 2010, the Vera Institute of Justice has assisted jurisdictions in reducing their reliance on segregation through the advancement of safe and effective alternatives. Previously, Vera has worked with state corrections agencies in Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Washington, Illinois, and Maryland, many of whom have seen great success with their segregation reduction efforts. Washington has reduced the number of prisoners assigned to maximum custody by 46 percent, from 581 in calendar year 2010 to 312 in calendar year 2015 (as of November). New Mexico, since instituting its reforms, has reduced its segregation population from 11 percent to less than 7 percent. Through its [Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative](#), Vera is currently partnering with state and local corrections systems in Oregon; North Carolina; Nebraska; Middlesex County, NJ; and New York, NY.

Through this blog series, *Addressing the Overuse of Segregation in U.S. Prisons and Jails*, bloggers of various perspectives from corrections officials and academic experts to advocates and formerly incarcerated people will examine the issues presented by the use of solitary confinement and discuss promising strategies for reform. Many of the bloggers are staff of Vera's [Segregation Reduction Project](#) and members of Vera's [Safe Alternatives to Segregation Advisory Council](#).

Please visit the [Safe Alternatives to Segregation Resource Center](#) for resources related to segregation research, reports, policy briefs, and information on promising reforms being implemented in jurisdictions nationwide and to learn more about Vera's work.

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