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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 [Aviva Stahl](#) | November 17, 2015

Nine individuals held in 23 and 24-hour isolation in Middlesex County jails C-pod [have filed a lawsuit](#), alleging their conditions of confinement violate their constitutional rights. One passage of the lawsuit reads, In C-Pod, time passes in long silences broken by the sudden outbursts of the mentally ill, who scream, bang on the walls and toilets, and jump on the beds in their cells.

[The New York Times](#) publishing an editorial entitled, Prison and Jails Put Transgender Inmates at Risk. They note, Transgender inmates who are assaulted or harassed are often placed in solitary confinement, which, though intended for their protection, is in fact a severe punishment. Isolation takes an enormous psychological toll on inmates, and can put them at increased risk of assault by guards.

A transgender woman [spent eight days in solitary confinement](#) at the Polk County Jail after being falsely accused of engaging in sex work. Meagan Taylor checked into the Drury Inn on July 13 with another transgender woman; staff at the hotel called the police to report suspected prostitution because the two were men dressed like women.

A federal appeals court has ruled that Albert Woodfox, the last incarcerated member of the Angola, [can face a third trial](#) for the 1972 murder of a prison guard. Woodfox has been in solitary confinement in Angola state prison for over forty years. His two previous convictions for the 1972 murder were overturned on grounds of racial discrimination and prosecutor misconduct.

Wisconsin's Dane County sheriff, along with one other person, [published an op-ed](#) about solitary confinement, calling it torture and barbaric. For what price has Madison sold its collective soul? the op-ed reads. Before fixing the potholes, and investing in manure digesters, shouldn't our first priority be those certain unalienable rights for all our citizens including the mentally ill?

Writing in [The Nation](#), Raven Rakia investigated the recent reforms put in place on Rikers Island to roll back the use of isolation, specifically the creation of Enhanced Supervision Housing units (ESHU). It is the Box [solitary confinement]. It's just a slick way around it, one prisoner said, describing his time in the ESHU. I've done four years in the Box and honestly, there's really no difference.

A man held at Ohio State Penitentiary has [gone on a hunger strike](#) after a new warden decided to limit his access to music and books. Keith LaMar, who has been in solitary for over 22 years, said that these changes may seem like petty stuff to people who don't know about solitary, but that reading and listening to music have kept him alive.

An investigation by New Jersey Public Radio [documented](#) the frequency with which immigration detainees at Essex County Correctional Facility are placed in solitary confinement. They found that detainees are placed in solitary confinement for non-violent and at times perplexing reasons including yelling and refusing to eat breakfast. The report also notes, the length of time a detainee spends in solitary seems to be arbitrary.

New York City's correctional officers union [called for the resignation](#) of Commissioner Joseph Ponte and condemned the department's new policy to end the placement of people under 21 in solitary confinement. Whoever thought getting rid of solitary confinement was a good idea needs to go, said Officer Raymond Calderon, whose face was slashed last week when he was allegedly attacked by two teens incarcerated at Rikers. I could have easily been killed. I almost died.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. She's 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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

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by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

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October 5, 2022

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