

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | April 30, 2012

Our latest piece over at Mother Jones concerns an important trial beginning today in Federal District Court in Denver, in which a prisoner with mental illness is challenging more than a decade in solitary confinement in the Colorado State Penitentiary. Also included is background on the groundbreaking work of the University of Denver's Civil Rights Clinic; on the use of solitary confinement to warehouse the mentally ill; and on recent challenges to solitary in the state of Colorado. What follows is the beginning of the article; you can read the full piece on [MotherJones.com](#).

Troy Anderson lives in [Caon City](#), a high desert town in a dramatic setting at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. But for more than a decade he has neither seen those mountains nor felt the sun on his skin. He spends 23 hours out of each day confined to an 8 x 12 isolation cell at the Colorado State Penitentiary (CSP), one of the state's supermax prisons and the remaining hour in a bare exercise room. Well over half of his 42 years have been spent behind bars, most of them in what prison authorities euphemistically call administrative segregation. In practice, this means Anderson will remain in solitary confinement until prison officials feel its time to let him out.

Anderson has been in and out of jail since he was a juvenile on account of his erratic and sometimes violent behavior. In 2000, he was sentenced to 75 years for myriad charges stemming from two incidents in which he shot at police, the second time in an attempt to escape custody. Offenses committed in prison have landed him in ad seg at CSP. (His last disciplinary infraction was in 2005, when he was written up for somehow managing to get envelopes to another prisoner.)

But there's more to the story. Anderson, like hundreds of other prisoners confined in isolation in Colorado and thousands held in solitary across the nation, is seriously mentally ill. His diagnoses include bipolar disorder, intermittent explosive disorder, cognitive disorders, and a seizure disorder. He has attempted suicide many times, starting at age 10. He is seen periodically by prison psychiatrists, all of whom seem to concur that he needs therapy and medication. At CSP, however, his treatment has consisted of a fiasco of intermittent and inappropriate meds and scant therapy, typically conducted through a slot in his solid steel cell door.

Yet unlike most of those other prisoners languishing in solitary, Anderson is about to get his day in federal court. Beginning today, in a trial that could have broad implications for how states handle inmates with mental illness, Anderson's lawyers will argue before the District Court in Denver that their clients' predicament violates his civil rights, under both the Constitution and federal law.

It was his untreated mental illness that first landed him at CSP, Anderson contends, and now the same symptoms are keeping him there indefinitely. Without proper treatment, he is unable to convince corrections officials that he's fit for the general prison population. This Catch-22, his lawyers say, condemns him to an effective life sentence under conditions that are increasingly being denounced as a [form of torture](#) particularly when applied to [mentally ill](#) prisoners.

Read the rest [here](#).

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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I feel there is a valid cause of action. This case brings to mind a local case involving the Calcasieu Corrections Center. A local man, Troy Buckins, was housed in the Special Housing Unit. He received no definitive care for his mental illness. He would be released time after time only to be re-arrested largely due to his mental illness. On his last release, he was gunned down outside of Reynaud Middle School in Lake Charles, LA. He was homeless and lacking any type of social connections to prevent recidivism. I would like to see separate housing for inmates with bonafide mental illness as well as assistance being placed in group homes or homes to continue with transition into society. Not being treated in prison is ludicrous especially where there are trained security to make sure medications is being taken. Access to psychotherapy and medications should be allowed to mentally ill inmates. I don't think the filing for ADA would lead to widespread releases into society but it could bring a different type of institution for inmates with mental illness.

It is also expensive (another reason broke states are giving it a second look).

This is where I find the greatest chance of success. I don't expect compassion from the BOP but in proving there is money to be saved now that is a powerful message to these broke states no matter how loud the industry cries.

his lawyers are claiming violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act. By failing to treat his illness and then effectively punishing him for it,

Having read about so many other prisoners on here isn't it probable that if this filing under the Americans with Disabilities Act if successful would lead to most of the prisoners held long term being released since they all have shown signs of various levels of mental illness brought on by years of isolation?

Good luck Rover.

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