

# 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](#) | October 26, 2020

The *Durango Herald* [reported](#) that a wrongful death lawsuit filed against Grants County, New Mexico claimed that county jail officials failed to properly monitor Fernando Rodriguez before he apparently killed himself in a solitary confinement cell. The lawsuit claims that officers failed to note his drug addiction and failed to document the needle marks in his arm when he was arrested in September 2018. While Rodriguez was placed on suicide watch at the jail, court documents say the cameras in his cell did not work and officers did not check on him for three hours. The Doña Ana County in New Mexico has also faced two major lawsuits in past years for the use of solitary confinement: one for leaving Stephen Slevin in solitary in horrific conditions for two years, which was settled for a record \$15.5 million, and another in 2019 for placing Susan Hylton in solitary after she requested to report sexual and physical abuse.

[According to NBC6](#), demonstrators protested outside the African American Research Library in Fort Lauderdale last Wednesday, condemning the Broward County Jail for holding a pregnant woman in solitary confinement while giving birth last month. Stephanie Bretas, the 28-year-old mentally ill woman who [gave birth alone in her jail cell](#) on September 27, was not the first woman at the Broward County Jail to be held in solitary during her pregnancy. Tammy Jackson, a 34-year-old African American woman with bipolar schizophrenia, also [gave birth locked in a solitary cell](#) at the jail in April 2019. In June 2020, [Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law the Tammy Jackson Act](#), mandating proper health care for incarcerated women and restricting the placement of pregnant women in solitary. Broward County Sheriff Gregory Tony fired two officers in relation to Bretas' mistreatment and the Sheriff's Office is investigating whether or not the Tammy Jackson Act was violated.

The *New York Times* [reported](#) that Alexandra Korry, a corporate lawyer with Sullivan & Cromwell and the chair of the New York State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, died on September 29. In December 2014, the committee issued a report concluding that holding youth in solitary confinement was harmful, ineffective, and disproportionately affected Black, Latinx, and mentally ill people. When the report was released, Korry said, consigning children and young adults to the degradation of solitary confinement is inconsistent with any standard of decency. Subjecting Blacks and Latinos disproportionately to such terror is unconscionable. New York City has since banned the placement of people 22 years old and younger in solitary.

[According to the New York Times](#), 28-year-old Billy McFarland, serving six years at Federal Correctional Institution Elkhart in Ohio for fraud, was placed in solitary confinement after participating in a new podcast. The first episode of the podcast *Dumpster Fire*, telling the story of McFarland's crimes, aired last week including a segment of a phone call with McFarland from prison. Since then, according to his lawyer, McFarland has been in solitary confinement due to an investigation by the federal Bureau of Prisons. We believe the investigation stems from his participation in the podcast and the photographs that were taken and utilized in the trailer, which were all properly taken, said his lawyer. McFarland's cellmate is also now in solitary confinement, after taking part in the podcast as well.

WBZ NewsRadio [reported](#) that a peaceful demonstration of about 100 people organized by Massachusetts Against Solitary Confinement protested the treatment of people held at the maximum security Souza Baranowski Correctional Center in Lancaster, Massachusetts. The protestors called the use of solitary state-sanctioned torture and abuse. One speaker asked the crowd, When did it become OK to have people who work for the state call my little brother the n-word? When was it acceptable to have people targeted because of their sexual orientation and thrown in the hole? It was never OK.

The Chair of the New York City Board of Correction Jennifer Jones Austin announced last week that the working group commissioned by Mayor Bill de Blasio in June to create a plan for ending the use of solitary is very close to completion of the plan, [according to the Gotham Gazette](#). Austin said that once the group completes the plan, they will present it to the board and the city, then open it up for public comment, and finally vote on the rule sometime hopefully in the next four to six weeks. The group includes the Commissioner of the Department of Correction, the President of Just Leadership USA, the President of the Corrections Officer Benevolent Association, and the Vice-Chair of the Board of Correction. Last October, the NYC Jails Action Coalition and the #HALTSolitary Campaign released a full [blueprint](#) for ending solitary confinement, and in response to the Mayor's recent announcement, said, The Mayor has the power to eliminate this torture immediately.

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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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