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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 [Valerie Kiebala](#) | October 1, 2017

In the *Burlington Free Press*, Vermonts Secretary of Human Services Al Gobeille claimed the state is in a [mental health crisis](#), as it keeps running out of beds for those in urgent need of inpatient psychiatric treatment once they have entered the criminal justice system. For those awaiting the opening of a bed, the default, instead of a hospital, has become solitary confinement, resulting in severe cases of mental deterioration. A Vermont Human Rights Commission investigation highlighted the case of one woman with severe mental illness who was subjected to the use of pepper spray, handcuffs and shields in an effort to move her out of her cell.

A *Dallas Morning News* Editorial [discusses](#) Texas s recent decision to reduce the use of solitary confinement in the state, arguing that the change will actually make society safer. Solitary can cause more problems than it fixes. Far from being an effective deterrent, experts say, it makes behavior and mental problems worse, the piece argues. In fact, the policy changes bans only disciplinary segregation, where 75 people are currently held, and leaves untouched the 3,000 individuals in administrative segregation.

Footage has been released of four individuals held in administrative segregation at Jackson County Jail, Missouri, assaulting a corrections officer in August. As Kansas KCUR reports, top law enforcement officials in Jackson County [described](#) the overcrowded and understaffed jail, where months earlier guards were indicted for beating incarcerated individuals, as a site of continual problems. Everything is a concern at this point. The whole thing is a concern.

[Jatary Evans](#), a man held at Jefferson Parish Correctional Center in Louisiana, committed suicide in his administrative segregation cell by hanging himself with a bed sheet. As the *New Orleans Advocate* reported, his death is the third suicide in the jail in a month. Katie Schwartzmann, attorney for the MacArthur Justice Project in New Orleans, said this indicates that the jail and its mental health services are in serious crisis, and that immediate steps need to be taken to prevent additional deaths.

Albert Woodfox, who served nearly 44 years in solitary confinement before his release from prison last year, [discusses](#) to the Financial Times his experience in Angola Prison in Louisiana, in decades of isolation, and in re-entering society. Woodfox, a Black Panther and the last member of the Angola 3 to be released after his conviction was overturned, recalls seeing men in the most horrible conditions and the overwhelming majority of them break and become institutionalised. Since his release, Woodfox has spent much of his time speaking or lecturing on solitary confinement and the racism of the prison system.

According to *Arkansas Online*, Arkansas public defenders [documented](#) their client Jack Greenes psychotic disorder, developed after living over ten years in solitary confinement on Death Row, in their attempt to prove him mentally unfit to be executed. According to the report, the disorder caused Greene to stuff tissues in his nose and ears until he bled and stand on his head in order to numb his pain. He is scheduled to be executed on November 9.

Evangelicals for Social Action [published a piece](#) on solitary confinement by Rev. Laura Markle Downton of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. Tracing the practice of isolation back to the Eastern Pennsylvania Penitentiary in 1829, Downton notes that solitary confinement in the U.S. had nearly been discontinued in the 20th Century after its damaging mental effects became widely recognized. Now, since its re-popularization during the tough on crime era, an estimated that 1 in 5 incarcerated individuals in the U.S. spends time in solitary confinement. The piece concludes with various ways to get involved in supporting alternatives to solitary confinement.

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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