

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Aviva Stahl](#) | April 27, 2014



The following roundup features noteworthy news, reports and opinions on solitary confinement from the past week that have not been covered in other Solitary Watch posts.

A Colorado bill that would prohibit the state from placing people with mental illness in solitary confinement is one step closer to becoming law. On Friday, the bill [easily passed through the Colorado House Appropriations Committee](#). It has already been approved by the state Senate.

A prison doctor and two staffers have [been let go from Kentucky State Penitentiary](#), after an ongoing investigation into an inmates death revealed extensive staff incompetence. James Kenneth Embry began refusing meals in December after he stopped taking his anti-anxiety medication. Embry, who was 6 feet tall, weighed just 138 pounds when he died.

[The Boston Globe](#) published an op-ed about the treatment of those with mental illness at Bridgewater Correctional Complex, the Massachusetts facility for incarcerated individuals with mental illness. When your son arrives at the prison, he is strip searched and almost immediately housed in a room behind solid steel doors and, as time goes on, left alone for long stretches with almost no human contact. His meals are delivered through a slot in the door. Every other day, he can talk to you on the phone (also handed to him through the slot), but the line goes dead automatically after 10 minutes.

Frontline aired the first episode of a two-part series on prisons in America. The documentary, entitled *Solitary Nation*, was reviewed by [The New York Times](#) and can be watched online [here](#). PBS also published an accompanying article, [Lock It Down: How Solitary Started in the US](#).

A local Maine paper, [The Bangor Daily News](#), interviewed Maine prison activists, prison guard union representatives and elected officials about their reactions to the documentary.

The [San Francisco Bay View](#) published an update on the hunger strikers at Menard. According to Alice Lynd, who receives letters from men held in Administrative Detention at the prison, all of the windows in the unit have been blocked. The men on the unit allege that corrections officer have been frequently strip searching them and slamming their heads against shower walls.

The *San Francisco Bay View* also published two letters from individuals held in solitary confinement at Pelican Bay State Prison ([here](#) and [here](#)).

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

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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Call in day for the menard hunger strikers was yesterday, but dont let that stop you from calling today!

<http://prisonbooks.info/2014/04/24/call-in-day-monday-april-28th-in-support-of-menard-hunger-strikers/>

We hope that any pressure on the administration can draw attention to the inhumane treatment prisoners are forced to endure and help prisoners get their demands met.

We are trying to focus our calls between 10am and noon on Monday, April 28th: But calling at other times is also useful.

Warden Kim Butler (New as of April 2014 and the first woman warden at Menard a 20-year veteran of the Illinois Dept of Corrections).
618-826-5071 ext. 2225

Illinois Department of Corrections
Director Lisa Weitekamp
217-558-2200 x. 4166

In reference to the PBS article, Lock It Down: How Solitary Started in the US above.

Dont be fooled this was not about Silverstein and Fountain alone.

History shows that the BOP guards saw in the Prison Movement of the 60s and 70s, a dangerous challenge to their authority. The roots of insurrection and defiance were coming from the New Left organizations like, The Weathermen, Venceremos, Black Panther Party and the Symbionese Liberation Army just to name a few.

The New Lefts prison movements rise also coincided with a rash of other murders of prison guards. So this alliance was a logical target for law enforcement across the country which then conveniently gathered up and placed many suspected members in Marion alongside less politically motivated violent prison gang members.

The predictable result was that between January 1980 and October 1983, there were more serious disturbances at Marion than at any other prison, including fourteen escape attempts, ten group uprisings, fifty-eight serious inmate-on-inmate assaults, thirty-three attacks on staff, and nine murders.

So putting Marion in permanent lockdown was an idea that had been discussed for years, and with these two murders, by two nonpolitical Aryan Brotherhood members, it became politically correct to do so.

In fact one can wonder if the Marion guard Hale was telling the truth when he stated that the management was actually behind the lapse in security that contributed to the murders of the two COs.

These two murders were so spectacularly gruesome and the perpetrators so devoid of political motives that even given the post Watergate and Church Committee antigovernment political climate the BOP was still able to justify the complete lockdown of everyone at Marion.

In 1990 a former Marion C.O. named David Hale discussed the aftermath.

I cant describe to you I never seen beatings like that. At least fifty guys got it, maybe more. I was only involved in seven or eight, but there was beatings every day there for a while. I had inmates ask me how long this madness was going to last. And I said, from what I seen, it better be a permanent lockdown, because when you beat a man like that, hes gonna retaliate.

Here is Hale making his claim of managements role.

Anything is possible I guess.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E08GHKCPK4>

A simple expedient would be to enact a law guaranteeing a minimum of six hours a day of recreational time a day in a setting where

inmates could socialize with others. Otherwise, a country with the resources to put a man on the moon should be able to design units for those who assault staff; to wit, a humanemax.

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