

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2017/02/14/solitary-watch-partners-with-advocacy-groups-on-first-report-exposing-solitary-confinement-in-nevada/>

Campaign and Advocacy

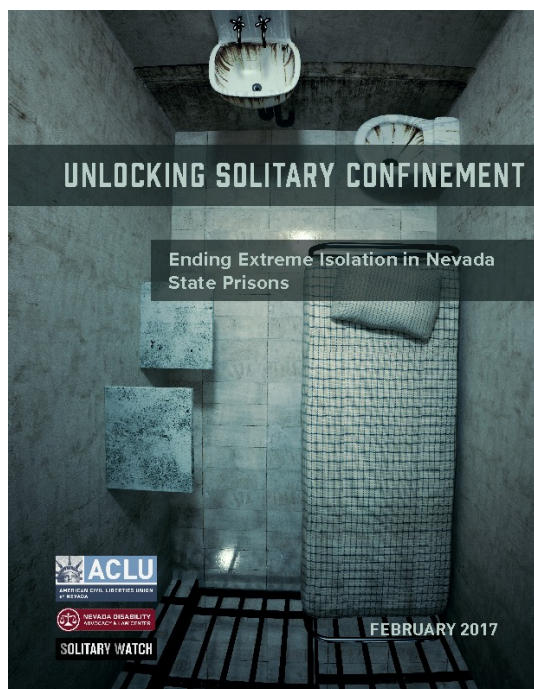
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by [Jean Casella](#) | February 14, 2017



A new report produced by the ACLU of Nevada, Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center, and Solitary Watch is the first to document the scope and impact of solitary confinement in Nevada. [Unlocking Solitary Confinement: Ending Extreme Isolation in Nevada State Prisons](#) reveals the number of people held in solitary in the state's eight state prisons, details the conditions experienced by men and women held in isolation, and provides recommendations for sweeping reform.

The 48-page report is the result of two years of collaboration between the three groups. Public records requests to the Nevada Department of Corrections were initially met with claims that the state's prisons did not employ solitary confinement, and were ultimately limited by the NV DOCs lack of data collection on the practice. Yet all three groups knew from our work that solitary was widely used throughout Nevada's prison system, and was in fact the norm at the state's notorious supermax, Ely State Prison.

With names supplied by Solitary Watch, we took the pioneering approach of collecting data directly: more than 700 incarcerated individuals currently or previously held in solitary in Nevada were contacted. Nearly 300 of them, courageously, responded to our appeal for information, completing a ten-page survey on subjects ranging from the problems with the provision of health care, exercise, and decent food to the sometimes brutal treatment by corrections officers to the harmful impact of isolation on respondents' mental state.

Data was aggregated and analyzed by Helen Zaikina-Montgomery for the ACLU-NV, while the report's lead writer, Solitary Watch's Katie Rose Quandt, drew from the surveys for narrative accounts of life in Ely and other correctional facilities, as well as from interviews conducted by the Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center with incarcerated individuals with disabilities.

I will be haunted by these terrible experiences until the day that I die and will take these memories and experiences and the effects of it all with me to my grave! said one man who suffers from mental illness, but has been held in solitary in Ely. The way people are being treated behind these prison walls in Nevada is wrong.

The publication of the report comes at a pivotal time for prison policy in Nevada, under the leadership of DOC Director James Dzurenda, who took office in 2016. Dzurenda has, for the first time in the history of the states prison, shown some willingness to reconsider howand how muchNevada utilizes solitary confinement. Late last year, Nevada announced that it had been chosen to participate in the Vera Institute of Justices Safe Alternatives to Segregation Project, which will study Nevadas use of solitary and make recommendations for change based on best practices and on successful reforms in other states.

Thethree groups that collaborated on *Unlocking Solitary Confinement*, along with other advocates, hope that both DOC leadership and state legislatorswill immediately respond to the recommendations made in the report, which include a comprehensive audit of Nevadas use of solitary confinement; institution of policies and practices designed to end the use of long-term isolation, including a 15-day limit on solitary; and a total ban on solitary for people with physical and psychological disabilities.

For Solitary Watch, the report marks our first foray into a major new initiative. Through ourState-Based Reporting Project, we will conduct an unprecedented level of quantitative and qualitative data from selected states, and use them to produce both investigative journalism and comprehensive reports. Choosing states where such work can have the most impact, we are collaboratingwith local advocacy organizations to produce the reports.

The reports will draw on both massive public records requests and surveys sent to thousands of people in solitary. Upcoming states targeted by the project include Louisiana, where a staggering15 percent of people in prison are held in some form of solitary confinement, and New Jersey, where we are partnering with Princeton Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR) and the ACLU of New Jersey, and where thiswork will help build momentum to override Governor Chris Christies [recent veto](#) of solitary confinement reform legislation. Our work on this project is made possible by support from the Roddick Foundation and the Langeloth Foundation.

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 [Jean Casella](#)

June 15, 2020

by [Jean Casella](#)

November 14, 2019

by [Katie Rose Quandt](#)

September 12, 2019

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