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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Aviva Stahl](#) | September 14, 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.

The American Civil Liberties Union [released 26 reports alleging extensive abuses in Arizonas prisons](#), including claims that individuals are being placed in solitary confinement because prison beds elsewhere are full. A federal class-action lawsuit against the states Department of Corrections is set to go to trial next month.

The Bronx Defenders, a criminal defense nonprofit in New York City, released a report documenting the conditions their clients experienced in solitary confinement on Rikers Island. Nearly 60 individuals were interviewed for the report, entitled [Voices from the Box](#), including one 18-year-old placed in isolation for over 1,000 days. (Reported on by [The Village Voice](#), [WNYC](#), others)

[Mayor Bill DeBlasio signed into law](#) a bill that mandates New York City correctional authorities to publish quarterly data on the use of solitary confinement at Rikers Island. The bill also requires the city to release other information, including attempted suicides in isolation and the use of enhanced restraints. Meanwhile, Corrections Commissioner Joseph Ponte [announced new reforms at Rikers](#), including in the use of solitary confinement.

The mother of Bradley Ballard, who died in isolation on Rikers Island in September 2013, has [filed a lawsuit](#) against the city and correctional officials, as well as a contractor that provides medical services at the jail and several medical personnel. The one-year anniversary of Ballards death was marked by a [Jails Action Coalition vigil in front of the Bronx District Attorneys office](#).

The recent death of another individual held in isolation on Rikers Island [has been ruled accidental](#). Jerome Murdough, who struggled with mental illness, died this past February when temperatures in his cell rose to over 100 degrees.

The family of a man who died while in solitary confinement in a San Diego County jail in March 2013 has [filed a wrongful-death lawsuit in federal court](#). Bernard Victorianne, 28, swallowed a bag of drugs while he was being arrested for a DUI. Jail staff allegedly placed him in isolation, rather than the jails medication-observation unit, despite knowing he had consumed the drugs and obvious signs of overdose.

Sarah Shourd, a contributing editor at Solitary Watch, published an article on [Guernica](#) entitled Torture Chambers of the Mind. She writes that the majority of people subjected to prolonged isolation are not there for violent acts, but petty prison infractions like talking back to a guard, walking too slow or possessing contraband.

Jose Padilla, a US citizen once held as an enemy combatant at a South Carolina military prison, [has been resentenced to 21 years on a](#)

[2007 terrorism conviction](#). A federal appeals court had previously ruled his original 17-year sentence too lenient, but prosecutors agreed not to seek more than 30 years if Padillas lawyers agreed not to utilize records documenting what he endured while in military custody. Padilla has claimed he was tortured for the three and a half years he was held in South Carolina, including through the use of sensory deprivation, truth serums and extreme isolation; in 2012 the Supreme Court declined to reinstate a lawsuit filed against US officials.

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.

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