

# 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](#) | September 16, 2018

Disability Rights Montana recently released a report that found youth being placed in solitary confinement for months at a time at Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility in Miles City, Montana. [According](#) to the *Billings Gazette*, one teenage boy reported serving nearly 100 of his first 234 days in solitary, including 71 days consecutively. Disability Rights Montana reported that during his time in solitary, the boy's mental health declined, he began hallucinating, and his grades dropped from As and Bs to Fs. Despite the urgency and concern expressed in the report for the safety of the youth held at Pine Hills, Montana legislators failed to pass a bill this week that would have banned solitary confinement for juveniles and pregnant women.

*Erie News Now* [reported](#) that Erie County, Pennsylvania settled a \$1.1 million lawsuit with 53-year-old Patrick Haight, who claims to have sustained life-threatening injuries, including strokes, kidney failure, collapsed or punctured lung, torn or restricted carotid arteries, acute closed head injuries, broken ribs, ruptured eye socket and numerous cuts and abrasions from the excessive force of Erie County Prison officers. The officers placed Haight in solitary confinement after the assault and did not provide him medical attention, causing him to end up on life support for fifteen days. The lawsuit claimed the incident, which was caught on surveillance tape, violated his 14th Amendment rights.

A coalition of St. Louis advocacy groups released a report this week called [Close the Workhouse](#), documenting the unspeakable hellish and inhumane conditions at the St. Louis City Justice Center, known as the Workhouse. One woman, arrested for a probation violation, spent 30 days at the Workhouse because she couldn't afford to pay bail. She recalled being placed in solitary confinement upon her arrival to the Workhouse: I was crying because I was separated from my children and devastated to be in the worst place possible, she [told](#) the *St. Louis American*. And so they deemed me a suicide risk and they took me to the women's pod and they took all my clothes away. They gave me a suicide smock, and they left me in that room for three days. The report found that over 95 percent are being held at the jail because they can't afford bond, and nearly 90 percent of people held at the jail are black, though black residents make up less than half of the St. Louis population.

*AL.com* [reported](#) that Robert Earl Council, the founder of the Free Alabama Movement, was transferred to solitary confinement at William E. Donaldson Correctional Facility leading up to the National Prison Strike and was released the day after the strike ended. Another member of the Free Alabama Movement said that Council, who goes by the name Kinetik Justice, being held in solitary was due to him exposing the ADOC [Alabama Department of Corrections] for all its corruption. Solitary is used against political prisoners and prisoners who speak up on inhumane treatment with the intentions of silencing prisoners. According to a prisoners rights advocate, Melvin Ray, another member of the Free Alabama Movement has been held in solitary at Limestone Correctional Facility in Alabama since 2014, after he helped organize a prison strike.

The *Kansas City Star* [reported](#) that a Muslim woman held at Leavenworth Detention Center, a federal facility operated by private prison company CoreCivic in Kansas, was placed in solitary confinement for refusing to remove her headscarf. The woman, Valerie Ealom, said that correctional staff first harassed her for her headscarf, calling it a rag and referring to it as contraband on separate occasions. She claims the harassment worsened after she filed grievances about it. Muslim Advocates, an organization based in Washington DC, sent a letter to CoreCivic and the US Marshals condemning the facility's failure to take any meaningful corrective action, permitting this harassment to continue for months.

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* [reported](#) that a federal judge approved a settlement this week that requires a reduction in the use of solitary confinement, an end to the use of pepper spray, and a reduction in strip searches at two juvenile correctional facilities in Wisconsin, the Lincoln Hills School for Boys (LHS) and the Copper Lake School for Girls (CLS). While the lawmakers had already agreed to close the facilities by 2021 after facing several lawsuits, this settlement mandates procedural limitations to be enforced until the closure of the current facilities and to remain in tact at the new replacement facilities. The settlement dictates that solitary confinement cannot be used as punishment, and teens must only be subject to confinement in their room for short periods, at most four hours.

*Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity* [republished](#) an article from the California Prison Focus Newsletter written by Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa and Baridi J. Williamson, both of whom were involved in the Pelican Bay Hunger Strikes in 2011 and 2013 that resulted in the

settlement of the *Ashker v. Brown* lawsuit and the reduction of California's use of solitary confinement. The article traces the use of solitary in California to the 1960s, when incarcerated people became more vocal about the violation of their human, constitutional and civil rights, which the writers say influenced the 1980s construction of California supermax prisons. Besides calling for an end to the use of solitary confinement, the article calls for treatment to be provided to those who have suffered the mental torture of solitary confinement, including support groups, access to trained medical staff, and mental health care.

The *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange* published a [commentary](#) arguing against all uses of solitary confinement on youth, citing the widely known consequences for the mental health of children and the lack of evidence for beneficial behavioral results. The article calls on judges to visit the detention facilities where they send young people, so that they can speak to youth about their experiences at the facility, become more aware of the conditions, and support alternatives to solitary that have proven effective. The authors point to reforms in Colorado as proof that reducing the use of solitary and creating a trauma-responsive environment through the construction of relaxation rooms, the use of pleasant furnishings, and an increase in mental health staff, can lessen violence.

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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<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2018/5/12/1763932/-Ed-Wall-extorting-Scott-Walker>

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