

# 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](#) | April 8, 2018

*The Brownsville Herald* [reported](#) that Cameron County, Texas, has agreed to pay the family of Fernando Longoria \$1 million after he died during a 10-day stay at the Carrizales-Rucker Detention Center in Brownsville on charges of a DWI. According to the lawsuit, Longoria, husband and father of three, fell into a violent seizure and instead of providing him medical care, the jail staff transferred him to a padded solitary confinement cell, where his health rapidly deteriorated and he ended up dying after suffering another seizure. The detention center has agreed to review the solitary confinement policy as well as the jails monitoring policies, since the cameras covering Longoria's cell happened to stop working eight hours before his death.

[According](#) to WBNB, a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of two teens against Broome County Jail in New York claims, Despite an emerging consensus that solitary confinement placed juveniles at risk of serious harm-including suicide, psychosis, and post-traumatic stress disorder and despite a national abandonment of solitary confinement of juveniles, the Broome County Sheriffs Office has embraced the frequent and arbitrary use of solitary confinement. A U.S. District Court has filed a preliminary injunction in response to the lawsuit mandating that: Under no circumstances shall a juvenile be locked in their cell for greater than four hours for disciplinary purposes.

*Truthout* published an [op-ed](#) called I Am Buried Alive in a Michigan Prison, which describes the authors experience in solitary confinement and his reflections on the practice. The typical response from readers, he writes, is to ask how they can help him. But he worries that this kind of response tends to emphasize the individual rather than the collective injury. It dismantles collective responses, and diverts attention from the larger picture: Solitary confinement is a form of torture. And every day, in every state, many thousands of people in American prisons are tortured with little recognition or outrage. The author calls readers to question who benefits from the use of solitary confinement and in whose interest does the system of social and sensory deprivation operate?

The *Pacific Standard* [reported](#) on a new program for juveniles at the Sacramento Juvenile Detention facility in California called the multi-sensory de-escalation room (MSDR), also referred to as the Cove, which has replaced the punitive method of solitary confinement with a more holistic approach aimed at rehabilitation. The Sacramento Chief Probation Officer, and creator of the Cove, Officer Lee Seale explained, The idea that if you make a detention center negative enough they wont come back is a myth. Their brains cant process risk and reward, or the long-term impact of their actions. We want to create a positive environment where they feel like they can put it all behind them, go to school, get a degree, get their record sealed, and be successful. Besides drastically lowering the costs for the facility, the Cove has led to a dramatic decrease in the amount of time that children spent in solitary confinement, from 28.3 hours a month in October 2010 to eight hours in the month of February 2018, according to Seale.

*City Pages* [published](#) a story refuting the idea that increasing the use of solitary confinement decreases violence inside a prison. It critiqued a report by Minnesotas KSTP radio, in which a reporter claimed that the decrease in the maximum solitary stay from two years to 90 days caused two incidents of assaults against officers. In response, the *City Pages* article cites the director of the state chapter of the National Association for Mental Illness: Theres no research showing that reducing solitary confinement causes more assaults. On the contrary, several states, including Maine, North Dakota, Texas, and Colorado have recently reduced the use of solitary confinement and there have been no signs of increase in prison violence. Colorado corrections chief Rick Raemisch, who implemented a ban on solitary confinement longer than 15 days, explained, The less you use it, the safer your facilities are, and the safer your facilities are, the safer your communities are.

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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