

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Aviva Stahl](#) | March 12, 2017

New Mexico counties have been [forced to pay more than \\$20 million](#) in civil rights about solitary confinement thus far, and may pay out even more in the near future five solitary confinement-related suits have been filed against the New Mexico counties in the last 18 months. George Abila recently won a \$1.9 million judgment against Eddy County after he was held for six months in a suicide cell without a bed or toilet, in which fluorescent lights stayed on 24 hours a day.

Meanwhile, New Mexicos House of Representatives [has passed a bill](#) that would prohibit jails or prisons from placing vulnerable populations in solitary, including children, people with serious mental health issues, or those who are pregnant. The legislation now moves to the state Senate for passage.

California will [stop keeping people on death row in solitary confinement](#) as a result of their purported gang affiliations. Under the recently announced legal settlement, people can still be sent to isolation, if they are considered an immediate danger to the prison or others, or if they have at least three infractions within five years, according to the AP. The maximum term for being sent to isolation will be five years, with reviews conducted every six months to determine who can be released.

The Supreme Court declined to issue a stay of execution for Rolando Ruiz, who was put to death by the state of Texas for a contract murder he committed in 1992. Justice [Stephen Breyer dissented from the Courts ruling](#). Mr. Ruiz argues that his execution violates the Eighth Amendment because it follow[s] lengthy [death row] incarceration in traumatic conditions, principally his permanent solitary confinement, he wrote. I believe his claim is a strong one, and we should consider it.

The Department of Homeland Securitys Office of Inspector General [issued a report condemning the conditions](#) at Theo Lacy Facility in Orange County, California, a jail that holds both immigrant detainees and those convicted of criminal offenses. According to the report, immigrants who broke the facilitys rules were placed in solitary confinement, sometimes for 24 hours per day, and denied access to visitors, recreation, a telephone or religious services.

The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina [issued a report](#) concluding that Mecklenburg County has excessively relied on solitary confinement to house 16- and 17-year olds, potentially causing permanent damage to the young people. Over 110 Mecklenburg teens spent time in isolation last year, including many youths who were awaiting trial.

Prison officials in Rhode Island are considering implementing changes in how they use solitary confinement, as a legislative commission in the state also takes steps to mandate reforms. The corrections department has already increased out of cell time for some people and allowed TV and radios in cells, [according to the AP](#), and other proposals may also be put into effect.

The family of a man who died of dehydration while in solitary confinement at the Milwaukee County Jail [has filed a lawsuit](#) alleging he was subjected to a form of torture. According to the lawsuit, during his 10 days in isolation, 38-year-old Terrill Thomas pleaded for water but was ignored by jail staff.

[Salt Lake City Weekly](#) published a piece entitled, Unlocking the box: as Utah State Prison moves beyond using solitary confinement as punishment, mentally ill inmates struggle with its legacy. The piece focuses on the stories of several people with mental health issues and/or developmental disabilities who spent long periods of time in the box and struggled to survive once paroled.

In a [new article](#), journalist [Spencer Woodman](#) analyzes hundreds of logs obtained from three immigration detention centers through a Freedom of Information Act Request. The logs show that life inside the facilities can be so dangerous and hostile that numerous detainees have voluntarily admitted themselves to solitary confinement just to seek refuge from the general population, he writes. In other cases documented in the logs, detainees were disciplined with isolation for perpetrating acts of violence, sexual assault, or disruption; yet others were placed in solitary for more minor infractions, such as charging detainees for haircuts or horse-playing.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and

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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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