

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2014/10/01/in-new-york-citys-jails-end-to-solitary-confinement-of-children/>

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by [Emily Sims](#) | October 1, 2014

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) has plans to minimize the solitary confinement of 16 and 17 year olds on Rikers Island. This according to an internal memo obtained by the *New York Times*, as reported in an [article](#) published earlier this week.

The revelation comes on the heels of a three-year investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), the findings of which were released [in an August report](#) by the U.S. Attorneys office in Manhattan. The report sharply criticized the DOC for its use of solitary confinement on the children in its custody. Among other abuses, the DOJ found that there is a pattern and practice of conduct at Rikers that violates the constitutional rights of adolescent inmates.

The report concludes that DOC relies far too heavily on punitive segregation as a disciplinary measure, placing adolescent inmates many of whom are mentally ill in what amounts to solitary confinement at an alarming rate and for excessive periods of time. The report also lays out numerous remedial measures, recommending that DOC develop and implement an adequate continuum of alternative disciplinary sanctions for rule violations that do not involve lengthy isolation of adolescents, and prohibit placing adolescents with mental health disorders in solitary confinement for punitive purposes.

On Sunday, the *Times* reported that DOC Commissioner Joseph Ponte had responded openly to DOJ's scathing critique. Ponte reportedly told members of the New York City Board of Corrections, the oversight body for Rikers and other city jails, that jail operations needed to be changed to better deal with adolescents. The *Times* shared the contents of Ponte's memo to Mayor Bill de Blasio, in which Ponte alludes to policy changes that could bring an end to the longstanding practice of confining 16 and 17 year olds in cells for up to 23 hours a day. The DOC puts the number of 16 and 17 year-olds currently being held in isolation at 51.

Although the September 25 memo is short on specifics, the *Times* reported, it says that solitary confinement will be replaced by alternative options, intermediate consequences for misbehavior and steps designed to pre-empt incidents from occurring when it comes to children on Rikers. According to the *Times*, the internal memo referred to the first round of changes Ponte will make to meet our shared can i buy ambien over the counter in canada commitment to a safe, just and age-appropriate correctional setting.

New York is one of only two states in which 16 and 17 year olds accused of a felony are automatically tried as adults and placed in adult jails while awaiting trial or serving their sentences. Earlier this year, under pressure from a lawsuit brought by the New York Civil Liberties Union, the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) which, [reached an agreement](#) that it would limit the use of solitary confinement for juveniles under the age of 18 in state prisons. [Research has shown](#) that without such restrictions, juveniles placed in adult prisons and jails are disproportionately likely to end up in solitary confinement.

Johnny Perez, who spent sixty days in solitary confinement on Rikers at the age of 16, sees the development as positive, but emphasizes that further change is needed. Perez works as a Safe Reentry Advocate at the Urban Justice Center and is active in the NYC [Jails Action Coalition](#), the grassroots group that has spearheaded the fight for change to solitary confinement practices on Rikers. In an email to *Solitary Watch* about the *Times* article, Perez wrote, Although Ponte's decision is a step in the right direction, there is still much work to do. As we know the brain is not fully developed until the age of 25, so ideally we would like to see all people 25 and under excluded from Solitary confinement.

This is a familiar caution, often echoed by advocates and raised during a [hearing](#) last July on the solitary confinement of juveniles before by the New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Dr. Bandy Lee, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine and [author of a report](#) issued to the DOC condemning solitary confinement, testified that exclusions from solitary confinement should extend to those older than 18, as the [brain is not yet fully formed until the age of 25](#).

Further progress could be made through the [Humane Alternatives to Long-Term \(HALT\) Solitary Confinement Act](#), introduced in the New York State Legislature earlier this year. HALT would ban all use of isolation on 21 and younger, in both state prisons and local jails. The bill, however, faces a steep uphill battle in both houses of the legislature.

Emily Sims is currently a photographer and designer based in Brooklyn.

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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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Hi from Australia

I spent many months in solitary as a juvenile in a local institution. I know first hand the grinding oppressive effects (excluding the typical turnkey abuse, taunts, deprivation of food, deprivation of bedding and clothing) of solitary on young adolescents. It is cruel beyond imagination, devastating to the psychosocial development of the victim child.

SC literally retards if not damages the brain of the entombed child. I am now an adult male with the cognitive and emotional intelligence of a 12 year old!

Personally, if I possessed the power to hunt down every single one of the turnkeys who participated in the degradation and destruction of my childhood and of other children, I would most righteously slaughter the lot of them. Unfortunately, I will never have this power, and must live out the remainder of my damaged life unavenged.

My point is this: civilised mechanisms, such as the painstakingly slow lobbying of local legislators etc in redressing these sanctioned crimes against humanity only go so far in any case small legislated victories can be rescinded any time in the future with the arrival of even more deranged and despotic right-wing politicians.

As a society, a community, a family and a nation, we need to rage enough is enough, and directly punish those complicit in the blatant torture of people, if not adults, then in the very least children!

Following orders is not an acceptable excuse by complicit turnkeys they should be identified by the community and destroyed. Soon enough, other turnkeys will get the message and leave children alone.

If I come back here in 10 years, I guarantee your Org will still be struggling against the same sanctioned criminal conditions for children ossified conditions which I forecast will have worsened.

Therefore ask yourself: are you prepared to standby for another decade while 1000s of more children are subjected to sanctioned torture? Alternatively will you re-evaluate your methods and deploy a different a strategy?

Hunt the torturers into extinction!

Good luck. FP

Regrettably many young people have had to suffer in order for this important change to happen. I just wish it didnt take us were all responsible so long to see the harm we do and then act quickly to end it. Good news, nevertheless.

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