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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Victoria Law](#) | November 10, 2014

Are people in prison allowed to stand up for their rights? Or does all organized resistance to inhumane prison conditions amount to rioting? Five men—Andre Jacobs, Carrington Keys, Anthony Locke, Duane Peters and Derrick Stanley—will stand trial in a case that may determine how Pennsylvania's justice system answers that question. The trial was scheduled to begin today, but the court issued a continuance until February 17.

All five had been held at the Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) at SCI-Dallas, a prison in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. In the RHU, men are locked into their cell for nearly 24 hours a day. People can be sent to the RHU for violating prison rules, including various nonviolent infractions. Shandre Delaney recalls that her son, Carrington Keys, was originally placed in the RHU for 90 days in 2001 when he got into a fight with another prisoner. He kept being written up for things like covering his light because the lights are on all night or for verbal assault for talking back to a guard, she told Solitary Watch. These write-ups extended his stay in the RHU. Keys spent most of his twenties in the RHU. He was briefly released in 2009 but was sent back to the RHU later that year on charges of having contraband. He attributes his return to solitary confinement to the numerous grievances, lawsuits, and criminal complaints he filed against prison staff.

Like Keys, Derrick Stanley was originally sent to the RHU for a few months. When I was in the chow hall in general population, the guard would give us three to five minutes to eat. When those three to five minutes was up, I told him, I would like to finish my food. He let me finish my food, but then sent me to the hole, he explained. There, Stanley accumulated write-up after write-up for other actions, such as attempting to cover his light or for talking back to the guards. He spent a year in the RHU.

If you've ever been inside a dog pound, you see individual dogs in individual cages, he described. In this particular unit [the Restricted Housing Unit at Pennsylvania's SCI-Dallas], it's like being a dog locked in a cage. The dogs depend on humans for food, water, and to be let out. We depend on the COs. It's like your life is in their hands.

Stanley said that staff utilized their positions of power to commit extreme abuses. He is not the only person to charge staff at SCI Dallas with human rights violations. In 2009, Human Rights Coalition-Fed Up! began an [investigation into conditions](#) at SCI Dallas. Through letters from people inside, interviews with family members, institutional paperwork, affidavits and civil litigation documents, the group compiled [Institutional Cruelty](#), a 93-page report detailing the cruelty, illegality, suffering, racism, violence, and despair that constitute the reality inhabited by inmates at SCI Dallas.

According to the report, cells are filthy and the water from the sink is often brown. Other complaints included failure to provide physical and mental health care, deprivation of water, and routine physical violence. Stanley recalls more than one instance in which staff notified him of a visit from his mother and sister. Staff handcuffed and shackled him. Then, instead of taking him to the visiting room, he said he was knocked out and thrown back in my cell. When his mother and sister did actually visit, driving six hours for a one-hour visit, staff told them that Stanley had refused the visit. They did not notify Stanley, who found out later from his mother.

Prisoners also reported that staff spit or put other bodily fluids in their food. In addition, staff frequently refused to feed a person by passing his cell as they handed out food trays (a practice known as burning them for their trays). Many men charged that staff prevented them from accessing the grievance box to complain about practices. Those who did manage to file grievances found that their complaints fell on deaf ears. I put so many grievances in, Stanley told Solitary Watch. They turned a blind eye to all of them.

In at least one instance, according to Stanley, staff encouraged a man to commit suicide. He was always yelling, I'm a kill myself! I'm a kill myself! Stanley said of fellow prisoner Matthew Bullock. Instead of seeking mental health treatment for him, Stanley recalled hearing the guards egging the man on. Kill yourself! Go ahead and kill yourself! The guards moved Bullock from a cell with a camera to one without a camera, where he hanged himself. Seven other prisoners independently reported the guards' actions, including the man's transfer to a different cell, to the Human Rights Coalition, which included these testimonies in their report. Although his was the only death labeled a suicide, Bullock was one of thirteen people who died that year in SCI-Dallas.

On April 29, 2010, Isaac Sanchez, then age twenty, noticed that staff had not given the man in the adjoining cell, Anthony Kelly, a food tray. Like Sanchez, Kelly had participated in HRC's investigation, detailing verbal abuse, lack of water and assaults by multiple staff on one person. I said, My neighbors not getting fed. That's not policy,' Sanchez told Solitary Watch. The officer said, and excuse my

language, Fuck him and fuck you and started burning me for my tray. Sanchez and the officer had a verbal argument, with Sanchez locked behind his cell door and the officer in the hallway. Then, Sanchez reported, the water to his cell was turned off, leaving him unable to use the sink or flush the toilet.

From time to time, the sink water would explode [out of the faucet] and water would get all over my property, my bed, and everything. Then, staff came to Sanchez's cell door and told him to pack his property and be ready to move. Sanchez recalled seeing twelve other correctional officers in the hall and, fearing for his safety, refused to move.

The lieutenant told me, 'You gonna come out of the cell or we gonna take you out,' he recalled. I told him I wasn't going to leave my neighbor.

Sanchez reported that he was then sprayed with pepper spray, beaten and tasered. He said staff cut his clothes away with a boxcutter and took him to a section of the law library where they cuffed him into a chair by his wrists and ankles. Sanchez recalled looking at the window and noticing it was dark out. Then the sun came out and I knew that the hours had passed, he said. Staff checked on him every two to four hours and, although a nurse was supposed to slip her finger beneath his wrist restraint to check his pulse, he was restrained so tightly that her finger was unable to fit.

Sanchez estimates that he was restrained in the chair for twenty to thirty hours. Then he was taken out and placed in an empty cell with no mattress, clothing or water for about 72 hours.

Others in the RHU attempted to do something about Sanchez's beating. In Pennsylvania's RHU, when a person covers the window to his cell, a supervising officer is called to his cell to ensure that he is not self-harming. In the past, people in the RHU have used this tactic to call in higher-ups to complain about guard brutality. That day, six men—Derrick Stanley, Carrington Keys, Anthony Kelly, Duane Peters, Andre Jacobs and Anthony Locke—covered the windows of their cell doors after Sanchez was beaten and taken to the restraint chair. That was our last resort. We didn't think they [the captain or superior] was going to help, but what can you do? You're locked in the cell, explained Stanley.

No supervising officer appeared. Instead, the men say, they were pepper sprayed and beaten. I lay on the ground, my face on the floor, put my hands behind my back [when the guards came into the cell], Stanley recalled. I lay on the ground in the submissive position and they kicked me in the face so much that I had to get stitches. I couldn't even cry, I was in so much pain. They tasered me in the groin over and over.

Stanley says that staff cut his clothes away with a boxcutter, then cuffed him. They took me asshole-naked in handcuffs and shackles all around the range in front of two hundred to three hundred men, Stanley recalled. I was still leaking blood. Then, he said, he was placed in a cage that he described as littler than a dog cage. That night, he could hear others being beaten. All you heard was the beating. You could hear the impact and the force, he described, rapping out a simulation of the sounds that night. You kept hearing, Stop resisting! and I'm not resisting!"

Delaney said that her son was similarly brutalized. Keys managed to send his mother a letter the next day. By the time you receive this, make some calls to the prison, he had written. They [staff] are on a rampage. When Delaney called, Keys had already been transferred to SCI Frackville. She called Frackville and spoke to the counselor, who assured her that her son was fine. After being transferred again, this time to SCI Camp Hill outside Harrisburg, Keys was placed in a stepdown program and, after spending a decade in solitary confinement, was allowed into general population. For his participation in the April 29th protest, he was issued a misconduct ticket for refusing to obey an order but was allowed to remain in general population.

Stanley too was transferred the day after the beating to SCI Mahanoy, where he was kept locked down for several months and, like Keys and the other men, issued a misconduct ticket for refusing to obey an order. On February 7, 2012, Stanley was released from prison after 22 years behind bars. He moved to New Jersey, moved into his own house, and enrolled in a community college to begin studying to be a paralegal. I started studying law so I could fight them, he recalled. But now he faces the prospect of being returned to prison for another seven years.

Months after their protest, the state filed charges against the six men, accusing them of riot and intent to prevent or coerce an official act. If convicted, each faces an additional seven years in prison. Carrington Keys has also been charged with aggravated assault.

In late 2010, Anthony Kelly finished his prison sentence but, instead of being released, he was sent to the Luzerne County jail where he was told he would be kept until the trial. In 2011, he pled guilty to the rioting charge. He was [released on parole](#) in August 2011.

Nearly four and a half years after their protest, the five other men will return to Luzerne County to stand trial starting on Monday, November 10th. The Luzerne County court system, based in the city of Wilkes-Barre, is no stranger to controversy. In 2013, two judges were found to have taken more than [two million dollars in bribes](#) from the owner of Pennsylvania Child Care and Western Pennsylvania Child Care, private youth prisons. In a scandal that became known as [Kids for Cash](#), the judges had sentenced over 4000 youth to these facilities between 2003 and 2008.

But Delaney and Keys remain optimistic. Because his case is so bogus, I think he's very hopeful that he will be successful, Delaney told Solitary Watch.

It was no riot, Stanley insisted. All I did was cover up my door *peaceful* covering up my door. I was locked in an individual cell.

They're being persecuted because they're whistleblowers, not because they did anything wrong, Delaney said at a press conference in Philadelphia two weeks before the trial. They had the audacity to stand up for themselves and for other prisoners. When they went to prison, they lost their right to live in a free society. They didn't lose their human rights and they didn't lose their civil rights.

Delaney sees her son's and the other men's actions as part of the movement of prisoners standing up against unprovoked violence and other abuses, including the 2010 work strikes in over a dozen Georgia prisons and the wave of mass hunger strikes in prisons across

California. They're standing up for their human rights, she said.

Days before the trial, Stanley doesn't regret his actions. I feel good because I fought. Not just for me, but for other people. Even that dead guy. Thinking about the four-and-a-half years between the incident and now, he would tell others in similar situations, There is hope. Never give up. There are people who care. Because of that, that's what kept me strong.

In response to a request for comment on the incidents described in this story, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections said in an email: We do not comment on matters of litigation.

Victoria Law is a freelance journalist and author focused on incarceration. Her books include *Resistance Behind Bars*, *Prison By Any Other Name*, and *"Prisons Make Us Safer" and 20 Other Myths About Mass Incarceration*. She tweets @LVikkiml.

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September 29, 2022

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Very good, in depth article. DannyC, if you get this message, could you please get in touch with the Dallas 6 campaign through sd4hrc@gmail.com or 412-403-6101?

I was an inmate worker in the rhu at sci Dallas when Matthew Bullock killed himself. I saw the horrible things that the guards did to men back there. I have my own civil trial coming up against Dallas staff. Keep fighting and good luck.

And this is what the bullies do to tame the masses.. off with their heads!

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