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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | September 2, 2018

The Guardian [reported](#) further suppression and retaliation against incarcerated organizers of the Nationwide Prison Strike, specifically through the use of solitary confinement and long-distance transfers. According to a spokesperson for the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, Leaders were picked off, one by one, and thrown into solitary in anticipation of the strike that was coming. One organizer held at Sussex State Prison in Virginia, Kevin Rashid Johnson, has been placed in solitary confinement on death row, even though he is not serving a death sentence. Johnson wrote, There can be only one reason they have put me here: to shut me up and prevent me fraternizing with other prisoners as they fear I will radicalize them and encourage them to resist their oppression. The strike began on August 21, when organizers released ten demands, calling for humane conditions, an end to forced prison labor, and additional reforms.

The Southern Poverty Law Center [filed](#) a class action lawsuit this week against CoreCivic, claiming that the private prison company forces immigrants to work in a Dollar-a-Day program to maximize profits at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility Stewart Detention Center in Georgia. According to the lawsuit, detained immigrants get paid as little as \$1 a day for their work, under threat of the sensory and psychological deprivation of their humanity resulting from solitary confinement. One plaintiff described his choice to work in the kitchen for 50 cents an hour or be moved to either solitary confinement or the Chicken Coop, an unsanitary, open dorm with frequent fights. The lawsuit calls for monetary damages and an end to the forced labor program, claiming it violates anti-trafficking laws.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture published a [press release](#) announcing a resolution passed this July at the Episcopal Church's 79th General Convention in Austin, Texas, called Condemning Prolonged Solitary Confinement as a Form of Torture that called all Episcopalians to stand against the use of solitary confinement in US prisons, immigration detention facilities, and military jurisdictions. The convention voted to accept the United Nations standard, defined in the Mandela Rules, that holding an incarcerated person in solitary confinement for longer than 15 days constitutes torture. This decision joins the Episcopal Church with other religious bodies, including the Disciples of Christ General Assembly and the Presbyterian Church, that have passed resolutions calling for an end to the use of solitary confinement.

The American Immigration Lawyers Association and the American Immigration Council filed a complaint against the Department of Homeland Security this week, alleging that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials attempted to coerce immigrant parents who had been separated from their children to sign deportation documents, by subjecting them to solitary confinement, depriving them of food and water, and verbally abusing them. [According](#) to the Associated Press, the Trump administration has still failed to reunite over 300 parents with their children, despite a federal judge's order that mandated the administration to reunite all families by July 26.

[According](#) to the *Nevada Current*, several individuals who had been transferred from the Nevada Department of Corrections to the Saguaro Correctional Center in Arizona as a result of overcrowding in Nevada facilities, have begun a hunger strike. The individuals have contacted the ACLU of Nevada with their complaints, including lack of visitation, denial of bank account access, inadequate health care, and use of solitary confinement. While the increase in complaints comes in the context of the Nationwide Prison Strike, the ACLU says the complaints have not specifically referenced the strike.

Families of individuals held at Crossroads Correctional Center in Missouri have taken steps to organize a class action lawsuit against the continued lockdown of the prison lasting months, after an alleged riot occurred at the facility. [According](#) to Fox4, the men have been kept in conditions of solitary confinement during this time, with no visitation, no hot meals, and only a few hours out of their cells per week. Lawyers involved in the lawsuit claim that this treatment violates the men's civil rights and constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. While 40 men are currently involved in the lawsuit, the lawyers anticipate hundreds will be eligible to participate.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [reported](#) that lawyers sent a letter to Fulton County officials in Georgia condemning the use of solitary confinement on a group of mentally ill women held at the county jail, most of whom could not afford the \$200 to \$500 bail. A Southern Center for Human Rights attorney said, You see caged people screaming incoherently with the overwhelming smell of feces in the air. It's barbaric. She said the conditions of solitary for these women are the most restrictive in the state. One woman, with a 25-year history of severe mental illness, died in solitary at the jail after she swallowed a spoon and a toothbrush. The letter calls on the Fulton County

Sheriffs Department to increase mental health care at the jail and eliminate the use of solitary confinement for mentally ill women.

[According](#) to the *Detroit Free Press*, a federal judge condemned Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)s use of solitary confinement on Iraqi immigrants detained at Calhoun County Jail in Michigan, in an attempt to pressure them to withdraw from a class action ACLU lawsuit. According to the judge, An ICE officer reportedly told a detainee that if he left the class he would be released from [solitary]. Additionally, immigrants have reported being sent to solitary confinement for reasons essentially fabricated or completely nonexistent. ICE has taken steps towards the deportation of the Iraqi immigrants, despite the religious persecution they would likely face as Christians.

The *Virginian-Pilot* published the [story](#) of Jan Green, a woman with schizophrenia who spent more than eight months in solitary confinement at the Valencia County Detention Center in Los Lunas, New Mexico. Green described the conditions in her solitary cell, the denial of feminine hygiene products, and deprivation of mental health care that led to a severe deterioration of her mental health. According to the article, Green was placed in a solitary cell, where there is no room for a bed. She has to lay her mattress pad down in the shower over the drain. When she sleeps, water drips on her from the pipe. Green was ultimately released, and the county awarded her \$1.6 million in a settlement. However, Green says she now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, in addition to her schizophrenia.

Valerie Kiebal 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 [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 5, 2022

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