

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/02/22/bill-to-limit-solitary-confinement-introduced-in-colorado-legislature/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | February 22, 2011

A bill just introduced in the Colorado state legislature would place curbs on the use of solitary confinement in state prisons, especially on prisoners with mental illness. As we've written before, Colorado [makes liberal use](#) of solitary confinement. The practice has spurred public debate over the opening of an [second costly supermax](#) prison in the midst of a budget crisis, and over a [controversial study](#) of prisoners in the all-solitary Colorado State Penitentiary.

The new bill emphasizes the economic costs of solitary confinement as well as its human costs. The following is from a press release issued this morning by the ACLU:

A bill introduced last night in the Colorado state legislature will end the all-too-common practice of warehousing prisoners with serious mental illness in solitary confinement. The bill would require a mental health evaluation for prisoners before they are placed in solitary and permit long term isolation only in extreme situations. It also would support mental and behavioral health alternatives to solitary confinement through cost-saving mechanisms and ensure that prisoners are reintegrated into the general prison population before their community release.

The bill is the first to be introduced anywhere in the nation since the beginning of economic crisis that takes a serious look at the extraordinary cost to taxpayers of overusing solitary confinement.

Using solitary confinement is enormously expensive, jeopardizes our public safety and is fundamentally inhumane, said David Fathi, Director of the ACLU National Prison Project. The vast majority of prisoners who are forced into solitary confinement eventually are released back into the community, making it imperative that we invest in proven alternatives that lead to greater rehabilitation and pave the way for successful re-entry.

S.B. 176, introduced by Sen. Morgan Carroll (D-Aurora) and Rep. Claire Levy (D-Boulder), is a response to the growing number of inmates in Colorado prisons who have been diagnosed as mentally ill or developmentally disabled, and the staggering cost of using solitary confinement, rather than mental or behavioral health alternatives, as the default placement without regard to medical needs, institutional security or prisoner and public safety.

In Colorado, 37 percent of those in solitary confinement are prisoners with mental illness or developmental disabilities up from 15 percent just a decade ago. The more than 1,400 Colorado inmates in solitary confinement spend 23 hours a day in isolation, for 16 months on average, at an increased additional cost of up to \$21,485 per year, per inmate.

By undermining the innate human need for social interaction, solitary confinement works against our goals as a society, said Jessie Ulibarri, Public Policy Director for the ACLU of Colorado. Releasing inmates directly from solitary confinement to the streets without any time to readjust to human interaction is a dangerous practice. What we want are people ready to fully integrate back into their communities, not people who are released from solitary confinement and led directly to the prison gate, only to return again.

A copy of the bill is available online at the following link:

http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2011A/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/A88F4FFC795C5C79872578080080E624?Open&file=176_01.pdf

And here is an editorial supporting the bill from the *Boulder Daily Camera*: http://www.dailycamera.com/ci_17395457?source=rss

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James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work

on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

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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Finally a common sense approach. We are treating those with mental illness worse today than we did 100 years ago. At least then we didn't know any better. Mental illness is an organic brain disease as are other psychological impairments such as autism and mental retardation etc. What kind of nation are we who will put our most seriously mentally ill in this type of environment of total isolation. This is state sanctioned torture of the weakest among us.

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