

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2020/09/01/seven-days-in-solitary-83120/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Valerie Kiebala](#) | September 1, 2020

The Intercept published an [article](#) on the use of solitary confinement in response to the coronavirus in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities across the country. Oscar Perez Aguirre, held at the Aurora Contract Detention Facility in Colorado said after his hospitalization for the virus, when he was still so weak that he couldn't stand, he was placed in solitary confinement for two weeks. Cuban immigrant Carlos Hernandez Corbacho, who was placed in solitary confinement at the La Palma Correctional Center in Arizona after contracting the virus, said, In the end, what they did was psychologically torture me. That's how I felt like they were punishing me for getting sick. In another Arizona ICE facility, officials placed at least 45 men in solitary after they tested positive. About 5,000 immigrants held in ICE facilities have tested positive for the virus, as of mid-August, and according to ICE, five have died.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) [reported](#) that Black immigrants held at the Pine Prairie Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center in Louisiana engaged in a hunger strike beginning on August 10 to protest racist and inhumane conditions under COVID-19. Prison officials placed the strikers in solitary confinement and used unnecessary lethal force to place them in choke holds, pointed a gun at them, according to SPLC. Following the hunger strike, the Cameroonian American Council, Freedom for Immigrants, ISLA Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy, and SPLC filed a complaint with the Department of Homeland Security, demanding the immediate end to the violence and discrimination against Black immigrants and their release from solitary.

The *Davis Vanguard* [reported](#) that four men recently released from the Santa Rita Jail in Alameda County, California described horrifying conditions, including lack of sanitation, solitary confinement, and denial of coronavirus testing. James, a man who shared his testimony, said, Its horrible in there, it really is. Its like a death trap I wouldn't want to go back in there at all. Another man named Troy said that the only cleaning supplies they received to clean the shower, toilets, and mirrors was Windex. That's it. That's all they gave us, he said. John, also formerly held at the jail, said that coronavirus-positive people are held in solitary confinement. You're in a cell by yourself, you're coming out for thirty minutes and it's not everyday. Its approximately every other day if not two days, John said. In the last five years, 40 deaths have occurred in the jail, and the jail's health care provider Wellpath has faced lawsuits for over 70 preventable deaths.

KCEN [reported](#) that Stevie Walker-Webb, an artist and activist, staged a 24-hour demonstration outside the McLennan County Jail in Waco, Texas last week in protest of his brother's continued stay in solitary confinement. The demonstration marked day 122 that his brother Steven Waday Walker-Webb was held in isolation. Walker-Webb was arrested during a bipolar schizophrenic episode on charges of resisting arrest. Walker-Webb's brother said, I want people to sit down and to look into that screen and to step into my brother's suffering with me. To sit for 24 hours and imagine themselves locked in a small closet without any access to human contact, without any access to life, without any access to anything that would make you feel like a human being.

The *Gothamist* [reported](#) that New York state prisons have abruptly suspended all testing for drug contraband, according to a leaked Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) memo. The tests had been administered using technology from Sirchie, a forensics company based in North Carolina, and had been criticized for producing false positives. The DOCCS directive nullifies pending disciplinary hearings based on the Sirchie tests but does not address the cases of incarcerated people already found guilty for contraband, many of whom were sent to solitary confinement or lost good behavior time. Victor Pate, an organizer for the HALT solitary Campaign said, The harm that has been done can never be reversed. What will be done for the thousands of people who have already been tortured based on false drug tests, who have already suffered permanent psychological and physical damage?

The *Orange County Register* published an [opinion piece](#) by forensic psychiatrist and professor Terry Kupers condemning Orange County's approval of \$261 million for a company to build 900 new jail beds at the James A. Musick Jail in Irvine, California. Kupers says this money should be directed towards community mental health diversion programs, rather than the incarceration of more people with mental illness. Kupers, who has extensively researched the effects of solitary, wrote, Officers at the jail rely almost exclusively on punishment for unacceptable behavior. Instead of helping the inmate with mental illness improve his or her behavior, they punish, often by consigning the individual to solitary confinement and the time in solitary exacerbates their mental illness and makes their prognosis and recidivism rates dire. Since 2015, the Orange County Sheriff's Department has seen a 40 percent increase in mental health cases.

WRAL [reported](#) that a North Carolina judge is considering appointing an expert to monitor state prisons response to the coronavirus, after the NAACP and ACLU requested oversight measures. The judge ruled last month that the state was failing to meet the conditions his court had ordered in June. Attorney Elizabeth Simpson said that the state is placing sick people in solitary confinement without access to cold water, sunlight, conversation or exercise, instead of placing them in medical isolation. What happens behind these prison walls can only be tolerated because most people never see it, said Simpson. The ACLU is calling for an expansion of a program that would allow more people to complete their time back in society. According to the state, ten incarcerated people have died from the coronavirus in its custody.

Valerie Kiebala 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 [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



Solitary Watch News