

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2017/06/27/voices-from-solitary-sent-to-solitary-confinement-for-being-disabled/>

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by [Voices from Solitary](#) | June 27, 2017

The following was written by Hector Matos, who is incarcerated in the New York State prison system on manslaughter and attempted assault convictions, and has spent long stretches of time in solitary confinement on various disciplinary charges. As he describes in his piece, he believes many of these charges are the result of his hearing loss and abusive treatment by corrections officers that is often related to his disability.

In his letter to Solitary Watch, Matos encouraged other individuals with disabilities to write to him so that we can connect, unite, and build a movement together. Sharing our stories and expressing our thoughts can strengthen us individually and collectively. I will share my story with you all and encourage you to send me yours. I will welcome you with open arms and a smile. He urges anyone who fails to hear back from him promptly to lodge a complaint with the prison, since he is concerned that mail might be destroyed. Letters should be addressed to Hector Matos #13A1032, Southport C.F., P.O. Box 2000, Pine City, NY 14871. Valerie Kiebal

Everything Ive been through in life has made me the man I am today.

I have a hearing disability. I have loss of hearing. In the year 2009, while at Rikers Island Correctional Department, three correctional officers jumped on me and beat me beyond recognition just because I was complaining about the handcuffs being too tight. Then they threw me into solitary confinement to cover up their wrongdoing. Their brutal beating resulted in nightmares, pain, and loss of hearing. I can speak and hear partially. I need two hearing aids to hear appropriately. Without the hearing aids, I cant hear well. When someone is talking to me from behind, I can hear the voice but I cant make out whats being said. When someone is speaking to me in front of me, I can read their lips, facial expression, body language, look into their eyes and listen. This combination allows me to distinguish whats being said.

On August 13, 2014, at Southport Correctional Facility while going out to recreation, the correctional officers handcuffed and then let me out of the cell. When I stood as instructed to get searched, I lifted my leg to be wanded. The correctional officer tried to tell me something, but I couldnt hear him because my hearing aid batteries ran out. When I turned my head to try to look at the correctional officer to figure out what he was saying, the correctional officers and sergeant stood around me in a violent manner. They then searched me and told me to go back to the cell. On my way back, approximately four correctional officers jumped on me, slammed me to the floor, and started to punch and kick me on my back and body. I screamed, What did I do? What did I do? I cant hear. I need my hearing aids. After I stated this, a correctional officer placed his foot on my head and pressed down hard, causing unbearable pain. The correctional officers picked me up off the floor, punched me, and dragged me into the shower. Then they slammed me to the wall and started to punch and kick me on my stomach, ribs, and back. While on the floor, handcuffed with a waist-chain, a correctional officer told me if I claimed injury or said that they beat me up, they would kill me. Then he kicked me on my stomach as a final disparagement of my loss of hearing.

To share with you a little about solitary confinement: Prison is a world within its own. Solitary confinement is a world within another world of the prison life. In solitary confinement, we are locked in a cell 23 hours a day and get to go out of the cell for one hour of recreation. Ive seen prisoners get brutally beaten by correctional officers, Ive seen prisoners cut up, hung up, kill themselves, not eat, scream, cry, talk to themselves and deal with their inner demons. Some hear voices, some go mad.

The Department of Correctional and Community Supervision have psychologist, psychiatrist, and mental health staff, but they only make rounds two or three times a week and only during the daytime, from 7a.m. to 3p.m. This essentially renders them useless, as prisoners mental health status cannot be properly determined from merely walking by their cell. Prisoners with mental health issues must be in an open environment, where professionals can observe, analyze, and treat prisoners with mental health disabilities. Some prisoners dont even reveal their mental health issues, from my observation. Prisoners may periodically reveal their mental health issues after midnight by screaming, crying, talking to themselves, hearing voices, dealing with multiple personalities, etc., while mental health staff are not around. And during the daytime, these same prisoners act normal. Therefore, they are not being treated nor given proper mental health care.

The correctional officers ridicule, laugh, and make fun of me every day, but I stay strong and continue to study hard and strive for a better and brighter tomorrow for us disabled people. No matter what disability you have, make the best of it and be proud of who you

are. No matter what, always hold your head up and carry yourself with confidence, believe in yourself, like we believe in you. Never give up and when you feel down, reach out to me and I will give you strength, support, and motivation to continue in our struggle. I will support you like I want the rest of us to support each other. If you ever observe someone bullying a disabled person, stand up and speak out against it. Be our voice.

We must constantly communicate with one another to give each other the strength, courage, inspiration, and advice to feel good about ourselves and to know that we're there for one another. Become a part of our movement, make your movement our movement to make each other stronger and wiser, to learn from each other's experiences, to build a force to be reckoned with, to stand firm and to stop the bullying against disabled people. Join us in our struggle. I've gone through being made fun of, brutally beaten, bullied, and being treated less than a human. I truly understand what many disabled people go through because I'm disabled too. I can relate. That's why I'm reaching out to each and every one of you to share my experiences, to build, and to make us a strong movement. I want to get to know each and every one of you, what you're going through, your strengths and weaknesses. Don't be ashamed of your disability(ies). Wear your disability like a badge of honor. Share with me your abilities and qualifications, what you're good at, and together let's figure out how we can make your disability an advantage.

I want to create and build a movement so that we can make a better place for this generation and the next generation of disabled people. Be loyal to yourself and to our movement. There's so much we can accomplish if we put our minds, time, and resources together.

The Voices from Solitary series publishes dispatches from people surviving the lived experience of solitary confinement.

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 [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

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September 6, 2022

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