

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/ian-manuel-speaks-about-solitary-confinement/>

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Ian Manuel spent 18 consecutive years in solitary confinement after he was sentenced to die in a Florida prison for a crime that happened when he was just 13 years old. EJI took on [his case](#) and he was released from prison in 2016 after 26 years of imprisonment. He is now using his story of survival to advocate for ending solitary confinement for children.

For 18 years I didn't have a window in my room to distract myself from the intensity of my confinement, Mr. Manuel [wrote](#) in an op-ed for The New York Times. I wasn't permitted to talk to my fellow prisoners or even to myself. I didn't have healthy, nutritious food; I was given just enough to not die.

Conditions like these put people held in solitary confinement at [increased risk](#) for self-harm and suicide, exacerbated mental illness, and higher rates of death after release.

The U.S. is the [only advanced nation](#) that uses prolonged isolation as a routine tool of prison management. United Nations standards on the treatment of prisoners prohibit solitary confinement for more than 15 days, declaring it [cruel, inhuman or degrading](#).

In 2015, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy [decried](#) [t]he human toll wrought by extended terms of isolation, including madness and suicide, anxiety, panic, withdrawal, hallucinations, and self-mutilation.

And President Barack Obama [banned solitary confinement](#) for juveniles in the federal prison system in 2016, writing that it can have devastating, lasting psychological consequences, including an increased risk of suicide, especially for juveniles and people with mental illnesses.

But too many states failed to follow the federal governments lead, and solitary confinement is still common across the U.S. even for children. It is [estimated](#) that at least 80,000 incarcerated men, women, and children are held in some form of isolated confinement on any given day.

Mr. Manuel tells his story in a powerful memoir released this year. [My Time Will Come](#) details how he used his imagination and love of poetry to survive being confined alone in an isolation cell from age 15 to 33.

Mr. Manuel points out that the abuses of solitary confinement persist because the practice is hidden from public view. That's why he's using his unique story to shine a light on the practice and call on state lawmakers to pass legislation reforming solitary confinement, especially for children.

Ian Manuel

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo [signed a new law](#) last week that will end the use of long-term solitary confinement in prisons and jails statewide. The law bars solitary confinement altogether for children and people with certain disabilities and prohibits holding anyone in isolation for more than 15 consecutive days.

I witnessed too many people lose their minds while isolated, Mr. Manuel wrote. Just as he used his imagination to survive 18 years in isolation, he's now determined to use his writing to make sure no other child has to endure what he did.

No human being should have to live through what I lived through.

Tags:

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My Time Will Come

I Survived 18 Years in Solitary Confinement

How He Survived 18 Years in Solitary Confinement

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