

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/07/03/one-year-anniversary-of-pelican-bay-hunger-strike-against-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | July 3, 2012

One year ago on [July 1](#), 2011, approximately 6,600 inmates across California launched a hunger strike in protest of conditions at Pelican Bay State Prison. The leaders of the strike were a group of prisoners referred to as the Pelican Bay Short Corridor Collective, a multiracial group of prisoners.

The group issued [five demands](#):

1. End Group Punishment & Administrative Abuse
2. Abolish the Debriefing Policy, and Modify Active/Inactive Gang Status Criteria
3. Comply with the US Commission on Safety and Abuse in Americas Prisons 2006 Recommendations Regarding an End to Long-Term Solitary Confinement
4. Provide Adequate and Nutritious Food
5. Expand and Provide Constructive Programming and Privileges for Indefinite SHU Status Inmates.

The strike would last three weeks before coming to an end. Several strikers would be hospitalized. The strike brought attention to the widespread use of solitary confinement in California; currently, approximately three thousand inmates are held in one of Californias three Security Housing Units, where inmates determined to be gang members are sentenced to indefinite terms in solitary confinement. Those sentenced to the SHU for gang validation must either become an informant and leave the gang, must be inactive for six years, or they must parole from their sentence; the phrase Parole, Snitch, or Die captures the means of leaving the SHU.

The strike prompted the California Assemblys Public Safety Committee to hold a [hearing](#) on the issue of long-term solitary confinement in Californias prisons. Corrections officials defended their use of the SHU, arguing that it was necessary in controlling prison gangs. [Critics](#) pointed to the mounting evidence of the detrimental effects of solitary confinement, the absence of due process in [gang validation](#), and the fact that many inmates have been isolated for [decades](#).

The hunger strike would not be the last. On [September 26](#), 2011, prisoners would launch another hunger strike that would also last approximately three weeks.

At least two hunger strikers would commit suicide.

Smaller strikes would follow at Corcoran State Prisons Administrative Segregation Unit [months later](#). One hunger striker, [Christian Gomez](#), would die during the strike.

In March 2012, California Correctional officials released a [new gang validation policy](#). The plan revised the criteria for being validated a gang member and implemented a step-down program in which inmates could hypothetically be released from the SHU in four years, instead of the average of 6.8 years.

Many of the original hunger strike leaders issued a counterproposal. Several have commented that the proposed reforms are inadequate and argue instead that placement in solitary should be based on conduct rather than real or suspected prison gang membership.

On May 31, the Center for Constitutional Rights filed a [federal lawsuit](#) on behalf of Pelican Bay SHU inmates who have been in solitary confinement for over 10 years, arguing that such long terms in solitary constitute violations of the Eighth Amendment. In addition the lawsuit challenges the gang validation system, arguing that the current system is a denial of Due Process rights.

To date, there remain over 3,000 inmates in Security Housing Units, and thousands more housed in solitary confinement in one of several Administrative Segregation Units across the state.

It remains to be seen how the new CDCR policies are implemented and how the many inmates effected by them will react.

Writings from Hunger Strikers:

[Letter from a Pelican Bay Hunger Striker](#)

[Letter from a Tehachapi Hunger Striker](#)

Profile of a Pelican Bay Hunger Striker

[Give Us in Here the Strength to See This Thing Through: A Chronicle of the Pelican Bay Hunger Strike](#)

Prisoners Respond to Policy Reforms

[Five Prisoner Responses to the Gang Validation Reforms](#)

[Prisoner Counterproposal](#)

[Voices from Solitary: A Lose-Lose Situation](#)

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

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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Thanks for the invite. I love finding humanitarian groups and support groups like these where like minded individuals love each other through the dark times into the light. I spent over 10 years in California's prison warehouses on drug related charges with a couple of those years in the SHU and most of the rest of it on level 3 and 4 yards where more than half the year was on lockdown anyway. I'm blessed to have turned it into something positive by writing novels about the drug war and prison conditions to shine a light on some of the corruption and the need for more compassion and common sense. I gift out kindle copies of any of my books to these groups to help get the word out, email me at rollcallthebook@gmail.com. I wrote Underdog to show the public that you can go into prison and be falsely validated into the SHU over just surviving a riot. Underdog and Race Riot are now available in audio to listen to like a movie and you can listen to part of it for free. <http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B00571NY5A>

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