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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Our Weekly Roundup of News and Views on Solitary Confinement

by [Aviva Stahl](#) | January 29, 2017

Timothy Muise was released from solitary confinement at MCI Norfolk in Massachusetts after being sent there for two weeks for [speaking by phone](#) to a local radio station, on the topic of lack of accountability in the Department of Corrections. His placement in the hole pending investigation of what was classified as a lowest level disciplinary offense misuse of the telephone violated the prison systems own guidelines. The MA DOC seems determined to silence Muise, who is 52 years old and has a long history as an incarcerated activist. As we [reported last year](#), he was previously placed in solitary after speaking to a caucus of state legislators about prison reform.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Juvenile Law Center of Wisconsin have [filed a lawsuit](#) alleging that children held in juvenile facilities in the state were placed in solitary confinement and attacked with pepper-spray for no reason. One young person named in the suit, JJ, penned an op-ed for [the Guardian](#) about how his time in solitary at the Lincoln Hills school for boys. Being in solitary messes you up: you cant sleep, you feel anxious, and the longer you are there the angrier it makes you feel, he wrote. I mean, you try sleeping with the light on 24 hours a day, or having to distract yourself in a small, dirty, smelly space.

A bill has been [introduced](#) into the New Mexico House of Representatives that would protect certain vulnerable categories of people from being placed in solitary confinement. If passed by both houses, the Isolated Confinement Act would restrict correctional facilities from placing pregnant people, minors, or those diagnosed with mental illness in isolation.

Governor Mark Dayton of Minnesota has asked the state legislature to [approve a \\$7 million](#) budget to reform the states use of solitary confinement and improve mental health treatment for people on the inside. A recent four-part investigation by the Star Tribune found more than 1,600 inmates spent six months or more in solitary over the past decade in Minnesota. More than 400 served one year or longer.

VICE published an article entitled, How solitary confinement haunts me five years after my release. Journalist Keri Blakinger [writes](#), I contemplated whether I still wanted to be alive and whether I could figure out a way to kill myself. Was the corner of that desk sharp enough if I fell on it at the right angle? Could I shove a noose through the vent?

The director of the behavioral health at Rhode Islands Department of Corrections [testified](#) in front of the Special Legislative Commission to Study and Assess the Use of Solitary Confinement, telling the Commissions 19 members about serious understaffing within the department. The supervising clinical psychologist for the DOC also testified, providing information about the number of prisoners with serious, persistent mental illness disciplined in solitary confinement between April and September 2015.

[PBS News Hour](#) covered the growing resistance to the social media ban inside Texas prisons. The policy prohibits people on the inside from having social media accounts, which are often run by family or friends on the outside. Civil rights leaders have blasted the decision and still say that it is a violation of the First Amendment, explained journalist Kamala Kelkar. But now other lawyers say they have evidence that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is using the policy as a tool to hold people in solitary confinement or otherwise punish them for exposing assault, horrid living conditions or other wrongdoings.

Aviva Stahl is a Brooklyn-based reporter who writes about science/health at the intersection of mass incarceration, national security, and trans rights. Shes written for the New York Times, Wired, BuzzFeed News, Solitary Watch, and other outlets. Find her [@stahlidarity](#) and at [stahlidarity.com](#).

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 [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 26, 2022

by [Caitlin Konya](#)

October 19, 2022

by [Mirilla Zhu](#)

October 12, 2022

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Tim, respect to you for what you do.

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