

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | May 3, 2012

This week, the The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry released a policy statement condemning the use of solitary confinement for juveniles. There is no comprehensive data on how many teens and even younger children are in solitary confinement in the United States, but it is safe to say that the number run into the thousands. Juveniles in adult prison [often end up in solitary confinement](#), and isolation is widely used in [juvenile facilities](#) as well.

On the [ACLU Blog of Rights](#) today, David Fathi, Director of the ACLUs National Prison Project, puts the statement in context:

As any parent knows, teenagers are different than adults. This common-sense observation is backed by hard scientific evidence; we know that an adolescents brain continues to grow and develop well into his or her twenties. The fact that teenagers brains are still developing makes them especially vulnerable to trauma of all kinds, including the trauma of social isolation and sensory deprivation.

Thats why the leading American child psychiatry association just approved a [policy statement](#) opposing the use of solitary confinement in correctional facilities for juveniles. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry represents over 7,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists and other interested physicians.

This groundbreaking policy statement from adolescent psychiatry experts comes not a moment too soon. While recent settlements in ACLU lawsuits in [Montana](#) and [Mississippi](#) include limits on solitary confinement for youth, the practice remains alarmingly widespread, with thousands of persons under 18 held in solitary on any given day, in juvenile facilities as well as in adult jails and prisons. I remember the first time I visited a 13-year-old boy in solitary in an adult prison his voice hadnt changed yet and he was too young to shave, but that didnt save him from being locked alone in a cell for 23 hours a day.

Solitary confinement can be harmful for people of any age, but its especially damaging to youth. The 17-year-old plaintiff in the ACLUs Montana case tried to kill himself several times while in solitary confinement in an adult prison. And while youth in solitary are a relatively small percentage of the total population of juvenile facilities, they account for more than half of the suicides.

Fortunately efforts are underway to end this inhumane and destructive practice. In California, Sen. Leland Yee introduced [a bill](#) to ban solitary confinement for juveniles except in the most exceptional circumstances. The bill attracted considerable support, but eventually failed to pass out of committee. And in West Virginia, the Division of Juvenile Services [recently announced a state-wide ban on the practice](#).

Click [here](#) to read the rest, and to sign the ACLUs petition against solitary confinement.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

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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<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/01/03/against-all-odds-0>

Human Rights Watch's report on juveniles serving LWOP.

Against All Odds

In pictures.

http://www.cbsnews.com/2300-504083_162-10012088.html?tag=contentAux;cbsPostCarousel

David Fathi statement is about teens but how about preteens?

I was only 10 the first time I spent a couple of weeks in solitary. Read my account here:

<http://solitarywatch.com/solitary-voices/memoirs/in-solitary-at-las-juvenile-hall/>

You'll also read about my older brother who spent most of his time in solitary whenever he was jailed. I am sure the brutality he received there is behind much of his problems in life.

I however found the most disturbing part of solitary was the screaming of other inmates.

In the Sartre existentialist play No Exit, he depicted an afterlife in which three deceased characters are punished by being locked into a room together for eternity, and the most famous quotation is, *l'enfer, c'est les autres* (Hell is other people), it means that certain other people can be the most effective form of hell.

Following this logic I find one version of hell is to be locked up in a cell block surrounded by totally insane people for what must seem to be an eternity.

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