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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 [Valerie Kiebala](#) | January 28, 2018

In a long [article](#) in the *Annual Review of Criminology*, Dr. Craig Haney provides a comprehensive review of the growing consensus against solitary confinement in the academic, legal, scientific, medical, and even correctional fields. The piece provides theoretical backing and empirical evidence of the detrimental consequences of depriving individuals of meaningful human contact through the use of solitary, as well as the high costs and lack of any legitimate penological purpose for the practice. Haney, a professor of psychology at University of California, Santa Cruz, has long been considered one of the nations leading experts on the devastating psychological effects of long-term solitary confinement.

The Orange County Register [spoke](#) with Carlos Hidalgo, an individual formerly held at Adelanto Detention Center in California, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility operated by private prison company the GEO Group. After his release, Hidalgo began working with the non-profit Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC) to circulate a petition calling for the media and government to begin calling detention centers what they really are: prisons. While GEO Group claimed their facilities to be state-of-the-art and very different than local jails and prison facilities, Hidalgo recalled the lack of sufficient food, medical care, and access to legal aid. After organizing a hunger strike against these conditions, Hidalgo was placed in solitary confinement for six days. Although the people held in these facilities usually have not been convicted of any crime, he said, "They house you like a criminal, they treat you like a criminal. There, you're seen like a criminal, therefore what is that? A prison."

York Daily Record [published](#) an article written by Witold Walczak, the director of the ACLU Pennsylvania, which, along with the Abolitionist Law Center, filed a class action lawsuit claiming that Pennsylvania is violating the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments by automatically holding every individual on death row in permanent solitary confinement. Currently, in Pennsylvania, individuals on death row have no possibility of stepping down from isolation, regardless of demonstrating good behavior or self-improvement. Almost 8 percent of the 156 individuals held on death row in Pennsylvania have spent a decade or more in solitary.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* [discussed](#) a legislative hearing for a new bill (LB870), introduced by State Senator Patty Pansing Brooks to the Nebraska Legislatures Judiciary Committee, which would prohibit the use of solitary confinement for juveniles, except when necessary to alleviate immediate risk of harm. Juliet Summers of Voices for Children in Nebraska pointed out the severity of the psychological effects of isolation for children, and views the bill as a step toward ensuring kids don't come out of detention and youth treatment centers worse off than when they went in. In response to concerns about violence in the facilities, Brooks said that the bill still allows the use of short-term isolation to prevent or respond to assaults, and expressed openness to working out specific alternative methods that will allow staff to remain protected while preventing the overuse of solitary.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) joined Georgetown University's Prisons and Justice Initiative in organizing a two-week exhibit at Georgetown in Washington, D.C. The exhibit featured *The Guardians* virtual reality piece 6 x 9 (for which Solitary Watch served as Consulting Producers), which places viewers inside a simulated solitary confinement cell for nine minutes, listening to the voices of solitary survivors. [According](#) to the campus publication *The Hoya*, formerly incarcerated individuals who had experienced solitary confinement hosted the exhibit each day, sharing their own experiences with viewers. Marc Howard, Director of the Prisons and Justice Initiative, stated: "I think we as citizens, as engaged, informed citizens have an obligation to confront the reality that in this country we've been putting people away and forgetting about them, and losing sight of their humanity and their suffering."

Two parents filed a [lawsuit](#) against Mercer County, claiming correctional officers conspired to kill their son Anthony Gyorffy and excessively beat him the day before he allegedly committed suicide in his cell at Mercer County Correction Center in New Jersey. Gyorffy's attorney said that he had been placed in solitary confinement before his death. *The Trentonian* obtained emails to jail administrators in which an attorney told county officials that other incarcerated men had witnessed Gyorffy being led to an unmonitored section of the jail, where he pleaded for the beating to end. No correctional officer has been charged for the physical assault of Gyorffy, which, the lawsuit claims, ultimately caused his death.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit on January 25 handed down a victory for opponents of solitary confinement. The decision concerned Timothy Finley, a man diagnosed with severe mental illnesses including bipolar disorder, who was being held at a

Marquette Branch Prison in Michigan when he swallowed a razor blade. Corrections officers responded by placing him in solitary confinement. Finley was later airlifted to a hospital to remove the razor blade that had lodged in his esophagus, but upon his return to the prison, was once again placed in solitary confinement. Finley filed suit against correctional officers, claiming their deliberate indifference violated the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act (RA). The district court dismissed Finley's complaint, citing the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA) and the fact that the prison had administered anti-psychotic drugs to Finley. But the MacArthur Justice Center at Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law appealed the decision, and the Sixth Circuit found that Finley has a valid Eighth Amendment claim, stating that if the prison psychiatrist states that solitary confinement will exacerbate a mental-health disorder, claiming that the medication makes it permissible is a little like bandaging a person's broken leg but then taking away his crutches and that a prisoner need not allege the worst-case scenario in order to get past the PLRA's screening system.

Do you know of an important solitary confinement story that we've missed? Please email us at info@solitarywatch.com.

Valerie Kiebala was a contributing writer and editorial and project manager for Solitary Watch, and is now the media director of Straight Ahead, which is building a decarceration movement throughout Pennsylvania. Her work has also appeared in The Root, Truthout, the Chicago Reporter, and Shadowproof.

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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