

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/02/05/shackled-in-solitary-inmates-with-mental-illness-in-michigans-prisons/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

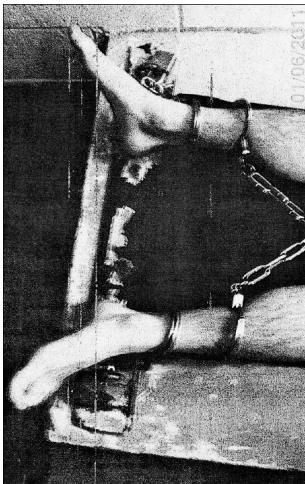
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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | February 5, 2012



In what promises to be the first in an occasional series of columns and editorials on mental illness and Michigans criminal justice and mental health care system, the *Detroit Free Press* has published a [powerful piece](#) by Jeff Gerritt on the fate of prisoners with mental illness, who end up languishing in solitary or worse.

According to the article, A 2010 University of Michigan study found that more than 20% of the states prisoners about 10,000 inmates out of a population of 45,000 had severe mental disabilities. The same study found that 65% of those with severe mental disabilities had received no treatment in the previous 12 months.

Many of these prisoners end up among the thousand or so held in administrative segregation in Michigan. MDOC administrators acknowledge that the percentage of prisoners with mental illness in segregation is probably higher than in the overall population. Prisoners in segregation are handcuffed when they leave their cells, eat off serving trays pushed through the slots of steel doors, and generally lack the few privileges extended to those in general population, such as telephone calls, contact visits and television. Some stay in segregation for months, even years.

Gerritt leads with the story of one young prisoner whose symptoms of untreated mental illness landed him in solitary, and eventually shackled to his bed.

On Jan. 10 of last year, corrections officers at Ionia Maximum Correctional Facility found 19-yearold Kevin DeMott banging his head against a blood-stained cell wall.

Diagnosed with bipolar disorder when he was 11, inmate No. 608233 had languished in solitary for four months, sometimes without the psychotropic medication his psychiatrist prescribed. Normally 5-foot-10 and 171 pounds, he had lost 25 pounds.

Officers ordered DeMott to stop banging his head, but he continued.

After DeMott told officers who tried to restrain him that they would have to kill him, he was hit twice with pepper spray, then manacled in belly chains and leg irons, according to a critical incident report. Soon after, prison authorities charged him with disobeying a direct order, resulting in 30 days loss of privileges.

Too often, the Department of Corrections punishes instead of treats mental illness. Michigans 32 prisons hold thousands of mentally ill inmates, including as many as 200 isolated in segregation cells, where they are locked up for 23 hours a day, or longer, unable to participate in treatment programs, and sometimes cut off from the medications prescribed to help manage their illnesses.

It's an insidious cycle: Mentally ill inmates act out and exhibit unstable or destructive behavior. Prison officials respond by further restricting their movements and their opportunities to get treatment.

Privately, MDOC officials acknowledge that many mentally ill inmates don't belong in prison, where security demands trump treatment needs. Over the last two decades, however, Michigan has slashed spending on in-patient treatment, leaving courts with few options but to send mentally ill offenders to jail or prison.

We don't control who comes to us, said Russ Marlan, administrator of MDOC's executive bureau.

Read the full story, complete with chilling photographs, [here](#).

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

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

This is 2014 and nothing has changed. We use our prisons to treat mental disorders. I witnessed this in a private youth lockup. Shame on us!

This treatment of our mentally ill is indecent and must no longer be tolerated. We at David's Hope are dedicated to securing mental health treatment rather than incarceration for those who are found to be in violation of the law due to untreated symptoms of their mental disorder. For more info see <http://www.davidshopeaz.org> We are working to bring an end to the use of long term isolation for all those living with a mental illness

For your student at the law school:

Dickens, for all his genius and wrath, was himself unable to undertake reforms, or protect clients, or draft fairer rules. He needed lawyers to achieve his vision of a just society. Even the inimitable novelist would agree that the two old trades must go hand in hand, together improving the noble system that, for all its Dickensian farce, makes us civilized.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/opinion/dickens-v-lawyers.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/opinion/dickens-v-lawyers.html?_r=1&hp)

While you are knocking on Michigan's DOC door, look next door to Arizona and ask them the same questions inside the SMUs that are full of SMI [severely mentally ill] persons locked up and mistreated ~~

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