

Solitary Confinement in New York State: The Facts

Solitary and Other Forms of Isolated Confinement Are Inhumane, Counterproductive, and Unsafe.

- People in isolated confinement in NY State spend **22 to 24 hours a day locked in a cell** the size of an elevator, alone or with one other person. They may be permitted 1-2 hours to exercise alone in a cage; they do not receive any meaningful programs or therapy, and often cannot make phone calls.
- The sensory deprivation, lack of normal human interaction, and extreme idleness can lead to intense suffering and severe psychological damage. Isolated confinement fails to address the underlying causes of problematic behavior, and often exacerbates that behavior as people deteriorate psychologically, physically, and socially. **Over 40% of all suicides in NY prisons in 2014 and 2015 took place in solitary**, though only 9% of all people in prison are in solitary.
- Many hundreds of people are released directly from extreme isolation to the outside community each year in NY; they receive no educational or rehabilitative programming, and no transitional services to help them prepare for their return to society, increasing rates of recidivism.
- Isolated confinement serves no legitimate purpose; states that reduced their use of isolation in prisons by up to 75% saw significant decreases in prison violence.

People are Regularly Held in Isolation in NYS for Periods of Time that Amount to Torture.

- Most people sent to isolation in New York State prisons spend **months or years** there; some individuals have been in solitary confinement in New York's prisons for **more than two decades**.
- The **entire United Nations General Assembly has denounced solitary exceeding 15 days**. In 2015, the US government voted for, and the entire United Nations adopted, the Mandela Rules, which prohibit any person from being held in solitary beyond 15 days. New York currently places **no limit on the total time** a person can spend in isolated confinement.

There Are Far Too Many People in Isolation, Disproportionately People of Color.

- On any given day, roughly **5,000 people are in isolated confinement in NYS prisons**; hundreds if not thousands of others are in solitary in local jails. Over 9% of people in NY prisons are in solitary – a rate 40% higher than in the early 2000s in NY, more than double the national average of 4.4%, and four times as high as the 2% reported in states like Colorado and Washington. The majority of sentences that result in isolated confinement in NYS are for non-violent conduct.
- **Black people** represent about 13% of all people in NYS, but represent 50% of those incarcerated in NYS, and **60% of people** held in long-term solitary confinement units in NY.

Even Particularly Vulnerable People are Held in Isolated Confinement.

- Young people and people with mental illness are disproportionately likely to be put in isolation. Over **870 people on the Office of Mental Health caseload remain in solitary in SHU** each day (more than 20% of all people in SHU) – the highest absolute number and percentage ever in NY's history. Pregnant women, new mothers, elderly people, and people with severe physical disabilities are held in isolation in NYS; members of the LGBTI community are often placed in solitary purportedly for their own protection and have suffered additional staff abuse while in isolation.

Processes Are Arbitrary and Unfair, with Insufficiently Trained Staff, and Little Accountability.

- Corrections officers are not sufficiently trained to address people's needs or problematic behavior; as a result, the default response is to write a disciplinary ticket for an alleged rule violation.
- Hearings by DOCCS employees to adjudicate disciplinary tickets that result in isolated confinement are arbitrary and unfair: 95% of people charged with these rule violations are found guilty. These processes occur within the closed prison system, with little public reporting by DOCCS.