

ABOLISH SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Right now hundreds of people in Washington's prisons are living in conditions that the international community calls torture and which mental health experts have found cause lasting physical and mental damage. For years the Department of Corrections has claimed that it has reduced its use of solitary, even partnering with reform-minded organizations such as the Vera Institute and AMEND. Despite these efforts, some people remain in solitary for years. Washington State needs to stop the use of this barbaric practice.

What is Solitary Confinement?

Solitary confinement in Washington means being caged alone in a concrete cell roughly the size of a small bathroom for 22-23 hours a day. Cells are bare, with a tiny closed window and a concrete slab and thin mattress to sleep on. There is always a light on in the cell, even at night. The only time out of this cement box is the handful of times per week that people are taken to another, slightly larger concrete box for one hour of "yard" time. People in Washington are put in solitary pending investigation of an incident and as punishment for violating prison rules. People are also put in solitary for an indeterminate time, with no known end date for their release. For these people, solitary lasts months, years, sometimes even decades.

817

Number of people in Washington's Intensive Management Units or classified as MAX custody as of December 2019

| Race | Number of people | % in WA | % in Prison | % in Solitary |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---------|-------------|---------------|
| White* | 564 | 68 | 69.8 | 69 |
| Black | 140 | 4.3 | 17.7 | 22 |
| API | 26 | 9.3 | 4.2 | 3 |
| American Indian/ Alaska Native | 56 | 1.9 | 5.8 | 7 |
| Other | 28 | | | |
| Unknown | 3 | | | |
| | | | | |

WADOC did not separate Hispanic from non-Hispanic white people in this data set but studies show that in 2017 Hispanic people made up 13% of the general population and 27% of solitary in WADOC.

Solitary Confinement is a Form of Torture

In 2015 prolonged solitary confinement was recognized as torture by the United Nations. That same year, the Washington Department of Corrections was one of only two states that signed in support of the "Mandela Rules," international guidelines that ban the use of solitary for more than fifteen days. Colorado, the other state that signed on, largely abolished solitary confinement in 2017. Since then, New Jersey has passed a law banning prolonged solitary confinement as well.

Washington eliminated the use of solitary confinement among juveniles in 2020; solitary is no less torture when used on adults and should be banned from use in the state prisons.

Ending the Use of Solitary Confinement Will Save Lives, and Millions of Dollars.

- ◆ Some reports estimate that solitary costs 2-3 times more than general population.
- ◆ In California, the cost of holding a person in solitary confinement is on average \$70,000. Housing the same inmate in the general population would cost \$58,000.
- ◆ In Colorado, it costs \$15-20,000 more per year to hold a person in solitary instead of general population; Colorado closed a 350 bed solitary unit, with a projected savings of more than \$13.5 million.
- ◆ It costs twice as much to house people in Ohio's maximum security prison than in general population.
- ◆ Mississippi decreased its solitary population and closed a unit, saving an estimated \$8 million per year.

Even by a conservative estimate, moving Washington's 800 people from solitary to general population would save millions of dollars annually.

Use of Solitary Does Not Make Prisons or Communities Safer

The National Academy of Sciences has found supermax prisons that hold people in solitary confinement have done "little or nothing to reduce system-wide prison disorder or disciplinary infractions."

After solitary reductions in Mississippi, experts in that state found that violence in the prisons actually decreased.

95% of the people in our state prisons will release to the community, including those in solitary; a Washington study found people who have spent time in solitary are more likely to recidivate once released, especially if released directly from solitary to the community.

Solitary Causes Permanent Mental and Physical Harm

Mental health experts have found that solitary causes anxiety, depression and PTSD, often leading to serious self-harm and even suicide.

A 2020 study on Washington's solitary population found that people in solitary reported increased chronic medical issues and decreased access to care.

People with disabilities, particularly those with mental health and cognitive conditions, are even more vulnerable to the damaging effects of solitary.

A study from New York found that while only 7.3% of its jail population was ever in solitary, 53% of acts of self-harm and 45% of acts of potentially fatal self-harm occurred within that group.

**To learn more about the movement to stop solitary, go to
<https://www.disabilityrightswa.org/programs/avid/>**

