



My name is Evie Litwok. I am the Executive Director of Witness to Mass Incarceration and I am a formerly incarcerated Jewish lesbian. I spent time in two federal women’s prisons and solitary confinement. I was placed in solitary for writing an article about poor medical care. All 1,300 women were seen by one physician’s assistant. Whether you had cancer, a cyst, a broken foot or a migraine, his diagnosis was always the same: you’re fat, walk on the track and drink water. When Miriam Hernandez went in to see him, she was in severe pain. He took no blood test, did no exam; he simply gave her the “fat” speech. She died two weeks later when her gallbladder burst.

An hour after my article was posted, I was arrested, shackled and told I would be in solitary for as long as they wanted to keep me there, for writing about an officer.

**(((Solitary is a Prison within a prison, run by a few people that get to do whatever they want. )))**

I was kept in solitary for seven weeks, a month past my release date. **I have never recovered physically, mentally or emotionally** from the experience.

I was **strip searched** and given a tee shirt, shorts, underwear and a jumpsuit, and a thin blanket, sheets and no pillow. The temperature was kept below 60 degrees and I was **freezing**. I wore all the clothes all the time, including the thin blanket. When I asked for a second blanket, the request was immediately denied

To understand the gravity of solitary, I want you to imagine being in your bathroom with the door closed. You don't have a phone, a laptop, a book or anything to read. There is nothing to do. There is no window to look out of, no shower or bath, no mirror and no medication. **YOU CAN SIT ON THE TOILET, STAND** or lie on your metal bed. Do you think you could endure this for 24 hours?

I suffered from **high blood pressure**, vertigo and migraines from the fluorescent lights. It was two weeks before they took my blood pressure. It was 200/100. I asked to go to the hospital, and the guard said, "we get \$75,000 if you die in prison." He laughed.

I was given one roll of **toilet paper**. I ran out and asked for a second roll. The guard said "wipe yourself," and waited until he felt like giving it to me. \*\*\*\*

I heard 60 women screaming, **get me the fuck out of here**, 24 hours a day. Many women tried to commit **suicide**. Some succeeded. I didn't want to kill myself, but there were plenty of times I thought that if I didn't wake up, it would be OK.

I was released five years ago. I did not know at the time of my release that the time I spent in solitary would impact my life every day. A very crowded subway, an airplane, or an elevator cause me to stop breathing. Small spaces cause me to suffer severe panic attacks, which led to a hospitalization because my doctor thought I suffered ministrokes. She was and continues to be concerned that a panic attack could lead to a stroke.

I also can't be in a loud space because it is reminiscent of the screaming of the women. I continue to suffer from vertigo for weeks at a time (an illness I didn't have before prison), which renders me unable to leave my bed.

Solitary confinement is a way to permanently destroy a person's mental health, when you have no concern for that human being.

It is inconceivable to me that in spite of the number of people testifying about the impact of solitary, the number of printed articles detailing its horrors, the body of research showing the harm it causes, that we are still discussing it at all.

I testified before you in 2015 about solitary confinement and its impact on my life. It is four years later. and many more lives have been permanently damaged. I hold you and this oversight committee responsible for the damage done to everyone

placed in solitary confinement. **What must we do to get you to abolish solitary confinement?** How many more deaths, suicides, and mental breakdowns will have to occur before it is eliminated? I don't want to hear that you have thoughts and prayers for those who died in solitary. If it were up to me, I would put each of you in solitary so you will experience first-hand how well your rules are working.... And to know the despair we feel.

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Signed: Evie Litwok, Executive Director

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