

Thank you for joining the New York Civil Liberties Union and Legal Services of Central New York as we announce a federal class action lawsuit against the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office for its unconstitutional abuse of children by locking them up in solitary confinement at the Onondaga County Justice Center in Syracuse.

Solitary confinement for juveniles is banned in state prisons, Rikers Island and all state juvenile detention facilities. But as today's lawsuit demonstrates, children are still subjected to solitary confinement in local jails.

Most of the children incarcerated in the Justice Center never been convicted of a crime but are simply too poor to afford bail. They are housed in an adult facility because New York has shamefully failed to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

This makes the Justice Center a perfect storm of criminal justice failures. Children have been thrown into solitary for singing Whitney Houston in their cell, for arguing about a basketball or sadly and sadistically, just for the amusement of a guard.

Solitary confinement is torture for anyone. But because children's brains are still developing, any time you throw a child into solitary confinement, there is a significant risk of severe, permanent harm.

Locked alone in a cramped concrete cell, for weeks or even months, children are denied anything resembling an education or mental health services. Their few human interactions often involve fear, humiliation and sexual harassment from adults. Driven to the breaking point, some even consider suicide.

Today you will hear from some of the people who have suffered through this torture. Their suffering is especially infuriating because it serves no "law enforcement" purpose – solitary confinement undermines safety undermines rehabilitation, and makes our streets and communities more dangerous. These stories leave no question that solitary for children must come to an end.

If you miss the speakers' names, or want spellings, please visit nyclu.org or call 212-607-3372.

- First, I'd like to introduce Sam Young, our co-counsel at LSCNY.
- Next you will hear Yvette Williams read aloud a statement from her daughter Charnasha, and then her own statement.
- Now you will hear from Randy, sent to solitary at age 16.
- Randy's mother Walta Williams will now speak.
- Next speaking will be Phil Desgranges, staff attorney and lead counsel for the case at the NYCLU.

- Josh Cotter, staff attorney and co-lead counsel at LSCNY.
- Finally, a statement from Luchele Chisunka, co-chair of the Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse Criminal Justice Task Force.
- Ack Mark Cass, ED and David Babcock, Pres.

We'll now open up the floor for questions. First, let's see if we have any questions from those in Syracuse. Sam or Josh, do you want to take any questions before we hear the questions submitted over the phone?

Thank you everyone. I encourage you all to also visit our website (www.nyclu.org) and social media to learn more about the unbearable costs of putting children in solitary confinement, and about the way forward.