

Hello, My name is Phil Desgranges, and I'm a Staff Attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union and lead counsel on this case.

This morning, in the Northern District of New York, we filed a lawsuit against the Onondaga County Sheriff on behalf of 16- and 17-year-old juveniles who are subjected to solitary confinement at the Onondaga County Justice Center. The six named plaintiffs are among at least 86 children placed in solitary more than 250 times since October 2015.

These 16- and 17-year-olds are predominantly children of color who have not been convicted of a crime. For misbehavior as minor as addressing staff by the wrong title, they are confined to barren cells with no meaningful human interaction for 23 hours a day, sometimes for months on end. Some are confined alongside adults, whose shouts keep them from sleeping and include threats of physical and sexual violence. In the showers, adults have thrown feces and urine at them.

Children are uniquely vulnerable. The Supreme Court has held that children cannot be punished like adults without accounting for their youth. There is a growing international consensus that solitary confinement puts juveniles at risk of psychosis, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even suicide. The sheriff's office has been aware that children are likely to suffer these harms in solitary. One reason the county began housing children at the Justice Center instead of the Jamesville Correctional Facility was ostensibly to end the solitary confinement of children. But in reality children continue to be placed in solitary.

The sheriff's office has also violated these children's right to an education. They receive no instruction in solitary, only inadequate worksheets that are not reviewed by teachers. For children with disabilities, there is no specialized instruction as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Today, we are asking the court to end the jail's practice of placing children in solitary confinement, which serves no public safety value and only inflicts serious harm on children.