

Juvenile Solitary Confinement Has Been Banned In L.A. County

by [Julia Wick](#) in [News](#) on May 3, 2016 1:06 pm



Central Juvenile Hall (Photo via Google Street View)

The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday afternoon to permanently ban the use of juvenile solitary confinement in Los Angeles County. The motion was sponsored by Supervisor Sheila Kuehl and Supervisor Hilda Solis.

L.A. County oversees the [nation's largest juvenile justice system](#); the county's three juvenile halls and thirteen juvenile camps house approximately 1,200 youth. A report from March said the conditions at Central Juvenile Hall were [as bad as a "third world country prison."](#)

The use of restrictive isolation housing for juveniles will now only be allowed in "very rare" circumstances when a juvenile must be separated from others as "a temporary response to behavior that poses a serious and immediate risk of physical harm to any person." Even then, "the placement should be brief, designed as a 'cool down' period, and done only in consultation with a mental health professional," according to the motion. County juvenile justice facilities will now "achieve safety through relationship-building, trauma-informed care, positive youth

development, small and therapeutic group settings, high-quality education, a relational approach to supervision, and an integrated group treatment model," according to the [motion](#).

Voluminous studies have shown that placing juveniles in solitary confinement not only causes long-lasting psychological damage but also leads to higher recidivism rates. [Data from the Campaign for Youth Justice](#) reflects just how grave that damage can be: youth are 19 times more likely to commit suicide in isolation than in general population, and approximately half of all suicides in the juvenile justice system take place when a young person is held in "room confinement."

Several members of the county probation commission—which passed their own resolution in support of the motion two weeks ago—spoke in support of ending juvenile solitary confinement. Probation Commissioner Dan Seaver, the resolution's author, urged the county supervisors to pass the motion. "It's clear that solitary is the wrong way to treat humans, especially young ones," he said, adding that engaging in alternate measures will help teach kids longterm behavior management skills, which will be especially helpful for those with longterm trauma. "Ending solitary is perfectly consistent with our goal of giving kids the proper resources to redirect their lives while they're still kids," he said.

During the meeting, both Kuehl and Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas also spoke of the trauma that a great many of the youth have already experienced before entering the juvenile justice system, some since birth.

There seems to be a near nationwide consensus that juvenile solitary confinement is an unthinkable practice in civilized society. The American Medical Association [called for an end](#) to juvenile solitary confinement in 2014, and a number of states, including Connecticut, Arizona, Maine, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Missouri, Alaska, New York and Texas, have already taken measures to severely curb the use of juvenile solitary confinement. State legislation to ban juvenile solitary confinement in California was first introduced in 2013, but the most recent iteration [stalled out](#) in committee last year.

President Obama issued an executive order in January 2016 banning the use of solitary confinement for juveniles in federal prisons, though his decision was mostly symbolic (the federal government is the largest incarcerator in the nation, but there are only 26 juveniles in federal prison, according to [a recent article](#)). Amy Fetting, the senior staff counsel of the ACLU, [called](#) Obama's decision "an enormous display of moral leadership."

Andrea Gordon, the president of the union that represents county probation managers, was one of the few voices that spoke out in opposition to the motion during Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting. She warned that many kids come into the facilities "bringing violent gang affiliations from the streets," and said that officers need to have the means to "separate children from one another when a danger is there that can pose a threat to their safety and security, and each other."

Per the board's vote, the Probation Department must create new policies, procedures, enforcement mechanisms, and reporting structures necessary to implement these changes by September 30, 2016. They have also been instructed to immediately begin repurposing or reconfiguring all Special Handling Units to alternative purposes.