

OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

Stop Putting Juveniles in Solitary Confinement

A reality for thousands of adolescents

BY EMILY RESTIVO

A 16-year-old paces back and forth. He's been locked in a small room -- completely alone -- for 23 hours a day for several weeks.

This isn't the opening scene of a Hollywood thriller. It's the daily reality for thousands of American adolescents who are subjected to solitary confinement after being charged with crimes, convicted and sentenced as adults.

Solitary confinement is dangerous for these youth -- and for society at large. It causes severe psychological harm and impedes reintegration into society. It's time



to put convicted teenagers in correctional facilities with people their own age -- and prohibit solitary confinement for those under the age of 18.

Proponents of solitary confinement claim the practice is necessary for safety. Isolating criminals prevents them from causing trouble in the prison and protects them from other violent prisoners.

However, research shows solitary confinement does more harm than good. It's linked to mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and psychosis. In some cases, prisoners commit suicide.

These effects are pronounced in juveniles because solitary confinement impedes their development during a critical period of brain growth. People's brains don't fully develop until their early 20s. Solitary confinement exacerbates

existing traumas, like the abuse and neglect that many of these kids have suffered in the past.

A report from the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch offers an in-depth look at the mental damage of adolescents who spent long periods of time alone in prison. They frequently expressed thoughts of suicide and self-harm, and relayed stories of hallucination, anxiety, extreme anger, and traumatic memories.

Consider the account of one young woman in Michigan. She noted that solitary confinement was like "being banished . . . like you have the plague or that you are the worst thing on earth. Like you are set apart [from] everything else."

Another girl from Florida said, "The only thing left to do is go crazy . . . I catch myself [talking to the walls] every now and again . . . sometimes I feel like, why am

I even living?"

Solitary confinement doesn't just put these teenagers at risk -- it endangers society. Prisoners who spend time in solitary confinement are more likely to commit crimes again in the future. Ninety-two percent of prisoners who were released from solitary straight into society reoffended within three years, compared with 66 percent of prisoners released from the general population, according to a government-commissioned analysis of 2001 data from Connecticut.

For these reasons, all federal prisons already ban solitary confinement for juveniles. Most states don't allow the practice in juvenile facilities. However, each year 200,000 children are tried as adults around the country. Many are sentenced to time in regular, adult prisons -- and face solitary confinement.

A colleague and I recently

completed research on this subject using data from the New Jersey Parent Caucus. Among juveniles sent to adult prisons in New Jersey, 76 percent spent some time in solitary confinement. Of that group, a staggering 31 percent spent more than 90 days in isolation. Another 16.5 percent were isolated between 30 to 90 days.

Solitary confinement causes mental health problems and does nothing to rehabilitate young offenders. We need to ensure children tried and convicted as adults are placed in juvenile facilities. Once there, they should be given opportunities to socialize with other kids and receive the support services they need to one day become productive, law-abiding adults.

Emily Restivo is an associate professor of behavioral sciences at New York Institute of Technology.

Oregon Should Push Back on Income Inequality

Ultra rich have never been so rich

BY DANIEL HAUSER

AND JUAN CARLOS ORDÓÑEZ

Oregon's ultra-rich — the highest-earning one out of every 1,000 Oregonians — have never been so rich compared to the rest of Oregonians, according to new analysis by the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

Such extreme income inequality undermines the well-being and opportunities of most Oregonians, while weakening the economy. Oregon lawmakers should be doing everything in their power to push back against growing inequality.

Analyzing recently released data from the Oregon Department of Revenue from the 2016 tax year, the income of the average member of Oregon's richest one-tenth of 1 percent was \$4.5 million. That was

an all-time high even after adjusting for inflation.

But it was not just the total dollars earned by the richest Oregonians that set a new record; it was also in how far the

the top 1 percent — the richest 1 out of every 100 Oregonians with income of at least \$401,000 — also increased in 2016, though it still stood below the all-time high reached before the Great Recession.

While observing that income inequality has been building over the years, the analysis noted a sharp rebound in inequality since the end of the Great Recession.

top-one tenth of 1 percent has pulled away from middle-income Oregonians. In 1980, the average income of the highest-earning 1 in 1,000 taxpayers was 26 times that of the Oregonian in the middle of the income ladder. By 2016, it was 127 times larger.

The income of the average member of

Still, the top 1 percent together earned more income than the bottom half of all Oregonians combined.

While observing that income inequality has been building over the years, the analysis noted a sharp rebound in inequality since the end of the Great Re-

cession. From 2009 to 2016, the average income of the top one-tenth of 1 percent in Oregon increased by about \$1.7 million, and the average member of the top 1 percent as a whole saw their income increase by about \$167,000. Meanwhile, the typical Oregonian saw an increase of just \$1,600.

With the Oregon legislative session in full swing, lawmakers should confront the problem of income inequality.

We need to make big investments in education, health care, and affordable housing to ensure every Oregonian can share in Oregon's growing economy. And to pay for these investments, Oregon needs to ask more from those reaping the greatest profits from our economy, the rich and the corporations.

Daniel Hauser is a policy analyst and Juan Carlos Ordóñez is the communications director for the Oregon Center for Public Policy.



Charles Washington

Born: 1951 - 2012

Former Publisher of the Portland Observer

In memory of an outstanding and dedicated member of Portland's Longest Standing Minority Publication.

The Portland Observer

