

Prison Isolation

The lengthy segregation and other penalties imposed on state prisoners accused of breaking prison rules is challenged in a federal lawsuit filed by the Kansas ACLU in February on behalf of four men who had been in segregation as long as eight months. Access to counsel has been seriously interfered with, according to the suit. One inmate received a letter from his lawyer only after it was delivered by another inmate, who had found it in a trash can. The same prisoner is being denied kidney treatment which prison doctors say he must have in order to live. The prisoners have not been given notice of charges or adequate opportunity to defend themselves. They are held in small, filthy cells and are denied most of the privileges afforded other inmates. They are losing "good time" credit, thus lengthening their prison terms. The lawsuit asks full due process procedural rights for the prisoners and freedom from arbitrary and cruel punishments.

Prisoners & Press

A group of journalists and a group of federal prison inmates, represented by the ACLU Foundation, have filed a federal lawsuit challenging the U.S. Justice Department's policy prohibiting press interviews of federal prison inmates. The journalists cite the freedom of press guarantee and the public's right to know; the prisoners cite their right of free expression. Prisoner-press interviews are now permitted in several states—in some places as the result of earlier ACLU litigation. Also, a similar suit was filed recently by the ACLU in Illinois, challenging federal restrictions on prisoners' rights to contact the press.