

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/04/21/testimony-from-hearing-on-closure-of-tamms-supermax-prison/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | April 21, 2012

Following Illinois Governor Pat Quinn's proposal to close Tamms Prison, the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability held a [contentious hearing](#), with proponents and opponents of the closure voicing their views on the controversial supermax facility. Nearly 700 pages of testimony is [available](#).

What follows is a sampling of some pieces of testimony to provide a glimpse into the debate with links, where available, to the full written testimonies.

### In support of closure:

The [ACLU](#) argues that the devastating effects of solitary confinement have long been well known and reviews evidence that solitary confinement has well-documented negative psychological effects, particularly when used for long periods of time. They cite a 2010 Illinois court decision finding that Tamms imposes drastic limitations on human contact, so much as to inflict lasting psychological and emotional harm on inmates confined there for long periods.

Further, the ACLU points to the reduction of supermax units in other states as examples that such reductions can be responsibly done without public safety concerns materializing. As one argument, they point to evidence that inmates released from prison from solitary confinement have higher recidivism rates than comparable prisoners released from general population.

Echoing concerns over the potential for supermax facilities to aggravate psychological problems, [NAMI](#) argues that supermax facilities such as Tamms have highly negative long term psychological effects on prisoners who are confined in these facilities. For individuals with pre-existing serious mental illnesses, the effects of confinement in supermax facilities can be particularly cruel and disabling. For example, the symptoms of schizophrenia, e.g. delusions and hallucinations, will very likely worsen in settings characterized by extreme social deprivation and isolation, such as supermax.

These problems are expanded upon in a [joint statement](#) of Dr. Stuart Grassian, Dr. Craig Haney, and Dr. Terry Kupers, who argue that long-term solitary confinement places prisoners at grave risk of psychological harm without reliably producing any tangible benefits in return. Responding to concerns that the outright closure of a facility will result in heightened security threats and prison violence they note the recent experience in Mississippi found exactly the opposite that a drastic reduction in the supermax population was followed by a reduction in prison misconduct and violence.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (pgs. 216-17), citing negative budgetary, safety, and psychological effects of solitary confinement, argue that the excessive use of solitary confinement is a stain on our society and a moral and fiscal price we cannot afford to pay. Closing Tamms is not only common sense, it is a matter of conscience.

According to the Illinois Department of Corrections (pg. 138): One of the reasons Tamms was chosen for closure is because it is by far the most expensive facility to operate. At an average of over \$64,800 per inmate per year housing an inmate at Tamms is more than three times as expensive as the state average of \$21,405. Closing Tamms by August 31, 2012 would save taxpayers \$21.6 million in FY13 and \$26.6 million on an annualized basis.

### In opposition to closure:

Prison officials, however, argue that Tamms is a necessary component of system wide safety.

Tamms Lieutenant Bradley Shields (pgs. 153-4) writes, Justice has been served, and the Tamms Super Max facility has done exactly what it was designed to do. It removed the most violent offenders, along with leaders of Security Threat Groups (a.k.a. GANGS), and housed them where they can no longer influence or be a threat to others.

Scott Farner (pgs. 99-101), Correctional Lieutenant at Shawnee Correctional Center, expands on this point and argues that the closure of Tamms represents a negative economic and public safety threat. Before Tamms Correctional Center opened 38 Illinois Correctional

Officers were killed while on duty, he writes, and continues, since Tamms Correctional Center opened there have been zero staff killed in the line of duty. Lt. Farmer therefore argues that Tamms has actually saved the taxpayers of Illinois, by decreasing staff assaults, inmate violence, riots and escapes.

That supermax facilities reduce system-wide violence is generally supported by two academic papers published on pages 13-78.

Others, however, urged Governor Quinn to keep Tamms in operation for economic reasons. The Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, for example (pg. 84), argues that closing this facility, which is located in an already financially depressed area of the state, will negatively impact the lives of the area residents, correction officers and local businesses. This is a perspective echoed by the Egyptian Community Unit School District No. 5 (pg. 86), and the AFSCME.

According to the [American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees](#): Tamms is a well lit, well maintained clean facility where, far from being 23-hour solitary confinement inmates at Tamms have human contact that is often more meaningful and focused on positive outcomes than may occur in the general prison population. Further, they argue, Tamms is a crucial economic anchor in an area of our state that has few employment opportunities especially for jobs that pay a decent wage on which it's possible to support a family.

Regarding the potential economic impact, the Southern Five Regional Planning District and Development Commission (pg. 7) claim that based upon our forecasting models the loss of these 250 jobs will result in the loss of an additional 201 indirect and induced jobs. The closing of the Tamms Correctional Facility will result in lost earnings alone of \$24 million for those 451 jobs affected. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Southern Five Region will be reduced by \$55 million. The total lost economic output will be approximately \$92 million.

Three current Tamms inmates submitted testimony in support of keeping the facility open (pgs. 177-182). One of them, who asserts that he has a rage problem, writes that Tamms has an excellent mental health unit. I am keeping myself in check because the staff cares. He goes on to say that Tamms is a deterrent from keeping us from hurting the staff, and urges people to just remember there has been no correction officer deaths by inmates since this place opened. Another Tamms inmate who was sent to Tamms for taking a hostage and sexually assaulting her writes that I need to be in Tamms for the safety of others and safety of myself from others.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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AGAIN the only groups that are commented on in these reports are national groups. Did any former prisoners of Tamms testify? Yes but who cares about them all they are good for is getting groups press and attention.

when will ACLU seriously take on California's SHU and prisoner abuse/exploit issues?

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