

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/12/04/tamms-supermax-report-reveals-more-guards-than-prisoners-soaring-costs/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

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by [Beth Broyles](#) | December 4, 2012

The *Belleville News-Democrat* known for a [2009 expos](#) that helped rouse opposition to conditions at Tamms Supermax, has now provided new ammunition in the [longstanding battle](#) to close the notorious prison. In addition to being both unnecessary and abusive, Tamms is incredibly inefficient, according to a [new story](#) by George Pawlaczyk and Beth Hundsdorfer.

Tamms Supermax, which is part of the Tamms Correctional Center in southern Illinois, holds all its inmates in solitary confinement, which was the purpose of the facility's design. After years of activist opposition and legal wrangling, it is now two-thirds empty. According to the *News-Democrat*:

Tamms has 208 guards and supervisors in its maximum-security unit, or C-max, to handle 138 prisoners, for a security-staff-to-inmate ratio of 1.5-to-1. At Alcatraz in the 1940s, the ratio was 1-to-3, according to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

The Tamms security staff also clocked at least \$884,000 in overtime since about this time last year, according to state payroll records for a one-year period ending Nov. 12. Overtime was accrued despite the fact that inmates in the solitary confinement supermax unit are held in their cells 23 hours a day and have no contact with other prisoners.

In addition, there are 16 food supervisors earning an average of \$71,600 a year working at Tamms. That's the same number of food supervisors as at the Pontiac Correctional Center, which houses around 1,700 maximum- and medium-security inmates.

In all, there are 300 employees for the entire Tamms operation, which includes an adjacent minimum-security camp with 89 inmates and about 13 guards, with an annual payroll of approximately \$18.7 million, according to figures from the Illinois Department of Corrections.

...

At the current 138 C-max inmate population level, it costs approximately \$85,000 just to guard one maximum-security prisoner per year excluding overtime. . . .

Most Illinois prisons have a per-inmate annual cost of between \$15,000 and \$24,000.



Governor Pat Quinn has sought to close the facility to save money in a state with an ongoing budget crisis, but efforts were stalled when the guards union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), filed a lawsuit claiming that closing the prison would make conditions unsafe at other prisons. However, according to the news story, a state arbitrator who was agreed upon by both sides in the lawsuit ruled that closing Tamms would not increase danger to prison guards. [Currently](#), state legislators are considering whether to restore funds to keep Tamms open, which would require them to override Quinn's veto.

According to the story, the staffing levels surprised some state legislatures. State Sen. Bill Haine, D-Alton, who had recently voted with the Senate majority to keep Tamms open asked, "Whos running things down there? I never heard about any of this, and, I wished I had known about this before the vote."

It sounds absolutely ludicrous. I wasn't aware of this, said Rep. Jim Sacia, R-Freeport, a member of the House Judiciary II and Appropriations Committee.

I don't know why there would be 16 food supervisors at Tamms, said Rep. Dennis Reboletti, R-Addison, a member of the Prison Reform Committee. We need to look into these staffing levels.

According to the article, food is not cooked on the premises but comes in cans or packages from a Florida wholesaler. There are two full-time GED instructors who do not actually see any students, but conduct classes through mail. And the prison employs a chaplain at \$74,650 per year even though no communal religious services are held at Tamms. Laurie Jo Reynolds, organizer for Tamms Year Ten, told the *News-Democrat*: Welcome to the AFSCME prison state: 16 food supervisors microwave packaged meals, two full-time GED instructors see no students, and 13 nurses monitor men on suicide watch due to sensory deprivation, she said. Meanwhile, the full security staff guards a two-thirds empty prison.

Beth Broyles was a research and reporting intern for Solitary Watch. A writer and educator, she now works for the Illinois Principals Association.

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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There is no mention of their pension packages based on all that overtime & wages.

It is always about jobs for these small towns.

The commonweal be damned.

I just researched how the CYA institution I spent time in came to be.

I learned it had a twin in Red Wing, MN.

The Preston School of Industry bill was signed into law on March 2, 1889.

The Sacramento Union reported:

IONE (Amador County), March 11, 1889

The town is wild with excitement over the governor's signature to the Reform School bill, locating the school here. Bells are ringing, and cannon booming, and everybody is happy.

To get ideas for the structures design, Robert T. Devlin, the President of the State Board of Prison Directors, visited some 22 institutions in Connecticut, Ohio, Illinois, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia, Indiana, New York and Minnesota.

Devlin was particularly impressed with the architectural plans for the Minnesota State Training School being built in Red Wing, a new correctional facility designed by architect Warren B. Dunnell.

Devlin returned with tracings of its architectural plans, submitting them to Preston's architect, Henry A. Schulze, for the administration building and annex.

Specifications stipulated that the steps, landing, and buttresses of the front porch were to be of Folsom granite delivered by the Prison Directors.

September 20, 1890, marked the beginning of active operations.

Since the bricks would be made at San Quentin and Folsom prisons, it was estimated that the state would save \$15,000 to \$20,000.

The contract also stipulated that no Chinese (Mongolian was their term) labor, or materials manufactured by Chinese labor be used.

Two carloads of bricks, 6,000 to a railcar, arrived from Pleasanton via the Southern Pacific Railroad. Conveniently, Ione served as terminus of the railroads Amador branch, and a shipping point for the surrounding area, including Jackson and Sutter Creek. This might explain how Ione Coal and Iron Co., a subsidiary of Southern Pacific, was motivated to donate the land for Preston School.

### A Ceremonial Beginning

A momentous ceremonial lying of the cornerstone preceded construction of the administration building. The ceremony was held the morning of December 23, 1890. Local newspapers reported that 2,500 people attended the ceremony.

On June 18, Governor Henry Harrison Markham issued a proclamation declaring that the Preston School of Industry would officially open on July 1, 1894.

The story of Red Wing is as similar as its facilities.

<http://www.citypages.com/2003-12-03/news/the-walls-of-red-wing/3/>

In the beginning, the town of Red Wing fought a protracted and frequently contentious battle to wrestle the reform school from St. Paul

O.M. Hall, a former state senator from Red Wing, was called on to plead his city's case. One of our strongest reasons for insisting upon the location of the reform school at our town grows out of a disposition to encourage rather than discourage our people and their efforts to make Red Wing a thriving community, Hall was quoted to say in the local paper, the Daily Republican. They have been somewhat despondent over the ravages of the cinch bug on the wheat crop. To make matters worse, local stone quarries had gone idle in a faltering economy, throwing many area residents out of work.

The political wrangling over the location of the school went on for several years, but Red Wing eventually did prevail, and on May 20, 1890, several thousand people (including a host of state dignitaries, transported from the railroad depot in a long procession of carriages) gathered at the site of the new school for the laying of the cornerstone. The correspondent for the Daily Republican delivered a breathless account of the day's festivities: Bright skies, at times almost cloudless, with the mercury resting in the thermometer just at that point where it is neither too warm or too cold for any one, dustless roads, a breeze just sufficient to prevent the sunshine from causing the heat to be oppressive, an immense throng, and general jubilation—those are the elements that combined to render the proper observance of the laying of the cornerstone of one of Minnesota's grandest correctional institutions—the state reform school—a success in every particular.

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

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