



**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TORTURE**

Hearing on the Proposed Closure of Tamms Correctional Center

**Submitted to the Illinois Commission on
Government Forecasting and Accountability**

April 2, 2012

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture is a coalition of more than 300 religious organizations and 63,000 individual supporters representing most of the major faith groups in America, including evangelicals, Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Jews, and Muslims. The religious organizations that belong to the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) contend that prolonged isolation is inhumane in the way it destroys prisoners' minds and violates humans' inherent God-given dignity. For people of faith across the country, ending prolonged solitary confinement is a moral imperative.

NRCAT urges the Commission to permanently close Tamms Correctional Center. More than 200 men are currently housed at Tamms in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day with little to no external stimulation. Some have been there for years, even decades.¹

Many studies have documented the detrimental psychological effects of long-term segregation, such as hallucinations, paranoia, perceptual distortions, and panic attacks.² Prolonged solitary confinement is prone to harm prisoners' minds; after all, God designed us as creatures that rely on community engagement. Genesis 2:18 reads: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone,'" and Proverbs 27:17 states, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Prolonged solitary confinement denies individuals the basic human need of community and therefore violates humans' inherent God-given dignity.

In light of the high financial cost of solitary confinement and its diminishing societal returns, states across the country are reducing their use of segregation and finding that there are safe

¹ "Trapped in Tamms: In Illinois' only supermax facility, inmates are in cells 23 hours a day," *Belleville News-Democrat*, August 2, 2009, available at <http://www.bnd.com/2009/08/02/865377/trapped-in-tamms-in-illinois-only.html>.

² Haney, C., and Lynch, M., *Regulating Prisons of the Future: A Psychological Analysis of Supermax and Solitary Confinement*, 23 *New York University Review of Law and Social Change* 477-570 (1997); Haney, C., *Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Solitary and "Supermax" Confinement*, 49 *Crime & Delinquency* 124 (2003); Cloyes, K., Lovell, D., Allen, D., & Rhodes, L., *Assessment of Psychosocial Impairment in a Supermaximum Security Unit Sample*, 33 *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 760-81 (2006).

alternatives.³ For example, Mississippi experienced a decline in violence within its prisons after it drastically reduced its use of solitary confinement in one supermax unit; Mississippi eventually closed the facility all together.⁴ Maine and Colorado also have made significant reductions in the use of solitary confinement without jeopardizing prison safety.⁵

Not only do these states demonstrate that limiting the use of solitary confinement does not come at the cost of safety within prisons, we can't sit idly by and neglect a much larger public safety concern. The effects of prolonged solitary confinement do not stay locked behind the prison gates. Studies show that prisoners who are freed directly from solitary confinement cells are significantly more likely to commit crimes again.⁶ The majority of prisoners at Tamms will eventually re-enter Illinois communities, so we must be sure to adequately prepare them for life in mainstream society.

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. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture strongly supports the closure of Tamms Correctional Center, and we commend the Illinois Department of Corrections for taking an interest in limiting the use of solitary confinement in other Illinois facilities.

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³ Erica Goode, Prisons Rethink Isolation, Saving Money, Lives and Sanity, New York Times, March 10, 2012, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/11/us/rethinking-solitary-confinement.html>.

⁴ Terry A. Kupers, et al., *Beyond Supermax Administrative Segregation: Mississippi's Experience Rethinking Prison Classification and Creating Alternative Mental Health Programs*, 36 CRIM. JUST. & BEHAV. 1037, 1041 (2009); John Buntin, *Exodus: How America's Reddest State – And Its Most Notorious Prison – Became a Model of Corrections Reform*, 23 GOVERNING 20, 27 (2010).

⁵ Lance Tapley, Reform Comes to the Supermax, PORTLAND PHOENIX, May 25, 2011, available at <http://portland.thephoenix.com/news/121171-reform-comes-to-the-supermax/>; COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION PLAN 1-2 (2012), available at <https://www.aclu.org/prisoners-rights/report-co-docs-implementation-administrative-segregation-plan>.

⁶ See, e.g., Lovell, David, L. Clark Johnson, and Kevin C. Cain, "Recidivism of Supermax Prisoners in Washington State," Crime and Delinquency 53 (October 2007): 633-656; MAUREEN L. O'KEEFE, CO. DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS, ANALYSIS OF COLORADO'S ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION 25 (2005), available at <http://www.doc.state.co.us/sites/default/files/opa/AdSegReport.pdf>.