



**BY OVERNIGHT DELIVERY**

February 23, 2012

Governor Pat Quinn  
Illinois State Capitol  
207 State House  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Quinn:

We write to applaud and support your decision to close the Tamms Correctional Center. Closing Tamms will save tens of millions of taxpayer dollars and will promote both human rights and public safety.

After fourteen years, the conclusion is inescapable that Tamms is an expensive white elephant, housing only a few hundred prisoners at a per capita cost that is three times the state average. There is no evidence that Tamms has made any contribution to public safety; indeed, evidence from other states suggests that prisoners held in solitary confinement have *higher* recidivism rates than those held in general population.

Moreover, there is abundant evidence that the kind of long-term solitary confinement that exists at Tamms is profoundly and sometimes irreparably damaging. In 2010 a federal judge found that “Tamms imposes drastic limitations on human contact, so much so as to inflict lasting psychological and emotional harm on inmates confined there for long periods.”<sup>1</sup> And long-term confinement has been the norm at Tamms; a 2009 study by the *Belleville News-Democrat* found that 54 Tamms prisoners had been in continuous solitary confinement for more than ten years.

Courts have recognized that solitary confinement can sometimes cause such extreme suffering that it violates the Constitution’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishments, particularly with regard to prisoners with mental illness.<sup>2</sup> The United States has also been repeatedly criticized by United Nations human rights bodies over conditions in supermax prisons like Tamms.

We hope that your decision to close Tamms is only the first step in a broader re-examination of the Illinois Department of Corrections’ use of solitary

<sup>1</sup> *Westefer v. Snyder*, 725 F.Supp.2d 735, 769 (S.D. Ill. 2010).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Jones’El v. Berge*, 164 F.Supp.2d 1096, 1125-26 (W.D. Wis. 2001) (ordering removal of mentally ill prisoners from supermax prison).

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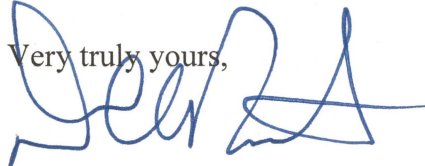
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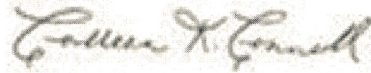
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confinement. In recent years, states as diverse as Mississippi, Maine, and Colorado have significantly reduced their use of solitary, with substantial cost savings and no adverse effects on safety. We hope that Illinois too will follow this path.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if there is any further information we can provide.

Very truly yours,  


David C. Fathi  
Director, ACLU National Prison Project



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