

Keep Tamms Correctional Center Open

System Safety Valve

All of our state's correctional facilities have a common mission: to protect the public, to supervise offenders during their incarceration and to prepare them for reentry into society. Since opening in 1998, Tamms CC has played a vital role in ensuring that this mission can be fulfilled. The Tamms Closed Maximum Security Unit (C-MAX) improves the safety and day-to-day operations for both inmates and staff at all of the other state prisons. Tamms is designed as a safety valve for our overcrowded and understaffed state prison system. Without it our prisons would be even more dangerous.

The Tamms' population is made up of men who have killed other inmates, beaten, stabbed or raped staff, or tried to escape when they were incarcerated at other state prisons. It includes an inmate formerly at Pontiac CC, who choked a correctional sergeant, then stole his uniform and tried to escape. It also includes an inmate who is serving a 240-year sentence for the rape of six girls. While at Dixon CC, where he was formerly held, he took a prison psychologist hostage, held her bound in a utility closet for 25 hours, and repeatedly raped her.

Governor Quinn points to the higher inmate cost at Tamms as a reason for its closure. But the higher cost is due in part to the fact that IDOC utilizes the C-MAX only when absolutely necessary. Only the most violent and disruptive inmates, those who pose the greatest risk to security, are placed at Tamms C-MAX. The gradual decline in population at Tamms over the past decade is an indication that the facility is meeting one of its core goals: serving as a deterrent to bad behavior at other prisons.

Closure Will Increase Overcrowding

The closure of Tamms will mean a loss to the system of more than 400 beds--200 maximum security beds, as well as another 200 minimum security beds operated at the facility. This would occur at a time when the prison population is at an all-time high and DOC is closing beds at other facilities as well.

If Tamms closes, overcrowding in maximum security units elsewhere would increase to 54% above design capacity and some of the few single-celled beds in maximum security would be lost. Illinois' prison system is so overcrowded that even most maximum security inmates are double-celled. Most of the C-MAX inmates would be moved into segregation units at Pontiac CC. As these are now full, the current occupants – who are all considered extremely dangerous--would be placed in less secure units.

To make matters worse, DOC does not intend to add any staff at Pontiac CC to cope with the additional numbers of extremely violent inmates who will be added to the population there. In all, DOC is planning to close eight facilities which house 2,300 inmates and lay off 770 staff, while leaving the remaining staff to manage a system that will be operating significantly above capacity and, for the first time in fourteen years, without its C-MAX to serve as a safety valve.

Specialized Treatment

Tamms' costs are also driven by the need for intensive and specialized staffing of the C-MAX. As the prison reform organization, the John Howard Association, stated in 2010,

“Of the 15 Illinois prisons inspected by JHA this year, Tamms is the only one with a nearly complete roster of security, medical and mental health staff.”

DOC spends more than \$1 million annually on the Special Treatment Unit, a state of the art psychiatric unit in the C-MAX. JHA’s report also noted, “Staff seemed very knowledgeable about the medical and mental health conditions of inmates. Inmates in the mental health unit said they were satisfied with their treatment.”

Tamms is a well lit, well maintained, clean facility. Its inmate housing is more spacious and modern than that available to anyone else in the system. Its staff members are highly trained in dealing with the population that is transferred to Tamms as a result of violent and disruptive behavior at other facilities.

Far from being 23-hour “solitary confinement,” the staffing complement and full array of medical and mental health treatment services, not to mention the very nature of movement and supervision at the facility, ensure that these inmates have human contact that is often more meaningful and focused on positive outcomes than may occur in the general prison population.

Economic Impact

Tamms CC 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. Tamms draws from a multi-county area, employing more than 300 people, in addition to helping to sustain a wide array of small businesses in the region.