Tamms C-Max, located in the southern tip of Illinois, 360 miles from Chicago, received its first prisoners in March of 1998. Modeled after the supermaximum prison at Pelican Bay, California, the partially underground facility was designed to hold 500 men in solitary confinement. There is no physical contact, no phone calls, no communal activities, no classes, no jobs and no rehabilitation programs. The idea was to restrict or eliminate privileges permitted at other general population facilities.

Originally, the IDOC indicated that inmates sent to Tamms for administrative detention could complete all three levels of the behavioral level system in one year. Inmates who were in disciplinary segregation would remain until their terms expired and then be eligible for transfer, or be placed in administrative detention and thus have the chance to work their way through the behavioral levels. The "extra punishment" at Tamms was meant to be a temporary measure. However, as we write, there are prisoners who have been there since the year it opened. Those men have endured a decade of uninterrupted solitary confinement. And most other men have been there for years and years. We believe that even one year is too much.

Solitary confinement for any substantial length of time has serious effects. Numerous studies have documented the effects of solitary confinement on prisoners—visual and auditory hallucinations, hypersensitivity to noise and touch, insomnia and paranoia, uncontrollable feelings of rage and fear, distortions of time and perception, increased risk of suicide and PTSD. But because these effects are primarily mental, they are more easily accepted by legislators and voters. Since few Americans outside of prison ever experience anything remotely like extensive solitary confinement, it is easy for most people to grossly underestimate the harsh realities that this kind of isolation induces; the extremes include self-mutilation, smearing of feces, non-stop screaming, and suicide.

The international community sees the matter more clearly. Many international convenants and human rights groups denounce the practice of prolonged isolation. In fact, the United Nations Committee Against Torture questioned the U.S. delegation (in both 2000 and 2006) for the prolonged isolation of prisoners housed in supermax prisons. The Committee remains concerned about the extremely harsh regime imposed on detainees in

Continued on Page 3...
Mothers Speak Out About Tamms

in the ten years I have been traveling downstate). That is an increase of 60%. A CNN article from April of 1998 indicated that gasoline was on average priced at $1.05. It is now over $3.00, an increase of 185%. Postage was 33 cents. Today’s news says that a first-class letter will increase to 42 cents in May, an increase of 27%. My salary has actually decreased since I first started going to Tamms and, as a senior, finances are a major focus in my world.

“I am ten years older now. There are many parents who were seniors when this all began and they no longer visit. I wonder, ‘Have they passed away? Did they die without ever touching their child? Or are they incapacitated physically or mentally? Can they no longer make the arduous trip?’ I am now changing my visits to every other month to save money and the wear and tear on my body and my vehicle,” she wrote.

Personally, in the eight years that I have been going to Tamms, I see a difference in the visiting rooms. They are not as full.

Continued on next page...

“‘The ties with family and community that prisoners depend on after release also promote safety during incarceration.’ – Vera Institute of Justice, 2006

Tamms is seven hours away from Chicago, where the majority of prisoners are from. At this distance, bonds begin to break down with family and friends. Furthering the harm is an inability to make phone calls. Stress and anxiety is already felt because of solitary confinement, but Tamms adds another factor by never letting a prisoner know when he may be released.

The problem for families is that they must make this trip by any means necessary. A family member or friend must write to the administration at Tamms two weeks in advance for approval for a visit and then hope for an approval from the Illinois Department of Corrections, hope for good weather, good health and the money required for such a trip. There is no public transportation to Tamms. Driving a car is the only way to get to the prison. From Chicago, it is approximately 339 miles down Route 57 to arrive approximately 20 miles from Cairo, Illinois. Once you get off the highway, you travel back roads to the prison. It is difficult to find if you do not have directions.

Many people, amazingly, make the trip in one day. The most essential reason for making these trips is for the mental health of loved ones who need to know that their prisoner is doing okay.

A mother told me, “It is one thing to go over to Menard or Stateville at the last minute and see my son, but the planning ahead by two weeks is exasperating. When he was at another prison, I could talk to him every Sunday. We had a scheduled time and I could get my coffee and wait by the phone. The phone call may have been expensive, but nothing compared to traveling to Tamms.”

One mother writes: “When I first started going to Tamms the hotel room I stayed in was $34.00. It is now $69.00 with a senior discount. (I have grown into that bracket
I have spoken to some people who planned a weekend trip, but they cannot do it very often because they are coming from another state. I have never been at Tamms when the visiting rooms have been full. For the most part, when I visit, I know the other people who are visiting. They are the regulars. I was told by a friend I met through our visits that there are about 25 people who have been coming to see their sons since Tamms opened. An estimate is that about 100 people at Tamms have visits, leaving about 180 men who never have visits.

The federal supermax in Colorado, ADX Florence, where the United States government has sent suspected terrorists, the Unabomber, the shoe bomber, Terry Nichols, Moussaoui, etc., was described like this on the news: the men can make phone calls and, at a higher level, can exercise in a larger area with hoops. All inmates have televisions with closed circuit educational programming and mental health channels as well as cable news and entertainment channels, Public Broadcasting Stations, and National Public Radio. These are privileges men at Tamms have asked for repeatedly. If men get out of Tamms, it is usually because of time served, but some have gotten out in a step-down program in which, after level 3, a prisoner will be sent to Pontiac for three months and then Menard. At that point they are assigned another prison.

“What worries me most is who will my son be when he comes home after being in solitary confinement for 10 years? Will he have a psychotic break, be paranoid or will his health be so bad that his life expectancy will be cut short by years? I want to prepare my home for him and let him settle in, but I know he won’t be able to find a job right away nor will he be able to just walk into a room with the whole big family. He gets nervous now, at Tamms, when too many people are around him,” a mother said.

We know that supermax prisons are bad for prisoners and their families, but we have no idea what this prison mentality is doing to our country. We have to wonder when our Congress has to have hearings to decide what type of torture is acceptable. We have to wonder why we have the largest prison population in the world, why we are a country that still believes in executions, and why we mentally torture our prisoners with solitary confinement.

“Mothers Speak Out…” Cont.

Tamms Year Ten Campaign Cont.

supermaximums, the prolonged isolation, and the effect such treatment has on mental health. The Committee is also concerned that its purpose may be retribution, in which case it would constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Art. 16, 2006). The practice of prolonged solitary confinement for prisoners is opposed by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, the European Court, the Continued on Next Page...
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benefit of society as a whole.

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**Tamms Year Ten Campaign Cont.**

European Committee for the Prevention of
Torture, the Inter-American Court for
Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, the
ACLU, and Amnesty International.

In the summer of 2006, a small group of
educators initiated a modest project
designed to deliver a small dose of human
contact to the approximately 270 men at
Tamms. The members of the Tamms
Poetry Committee wanted to do one of the
few things you can do for a person in
solitary confinement—send mail. The plan
was to send a poem, and a letter
introducing it, to each and every prisoner.
(We started with a poem that a Tamms
penpal had sent to one of our members,
"Emptiness" by Yusuf O. Kassam.) The
letter included an invitation to correspond
with members of the group and to share
poems or other artwork. Not surprisingly,
the reaction from within Tamms C-Max
was immediate. Many prisoners were
happy to have a chance to communicate
with a fellow human being.

We appreciated these letters from
interesting, expressive people who
engaged us in difficult and complex
subjects—and wanted the opportunity for
personal growth, friendship, education,
jobs, connections to their family, and, of
course, the opportunity for communal
activity and social contact. Some guys
argued with us about the poems we were
sending, and some surprised us with the
poems they liked. Many, many men sent
us great poetry and we have used it all at
our public events. A couple people said
stop sending poetry and just help us.
Indeed, once these personal connections
were established, and we learned more
about Tamms, the Tamms Poetry
Committee felt that we had to do more to
help our new friends. We weren’t
optimistic that anything could be done, but
we knew we had to try.

We began staging public events where
anyone interested in prison reform could
find out more about long-term solitary
confinement in general, and Tamms in
particular. At each event, we foregrounded
the words, testimony and art of the
prisoners because they made the case
much better than we can. Former
Tamms prisoners and family members
moved and stunned people with their
stories. We continued to hold mailings
and letter-writing events for the men, as
a way for new people to become
involved.

We saw the ten-year anniversary of
the opening of Tamms as an opportunity to
bring attention to the detrimental effects
of long-term solitary confinement for
the men at Tamms and to ask the state to
reconsider this misguided policy. Along
with former Tamms prisoners, family
members, new people and
organizations, we initiated a campaign
called "Tamms Year Ten" to publicize
and protest conditions. Now, we are
honored to have the support of many
allies and endorsers who recognize that
Tamms is inhumane, and unacceptable.
Together, we are planning events to
mark this anniversary, including poetry
readings, teach-ins, letter-writing
events, film screenings, an original play
about Tamms, and concerts. On March
15, there will be a benefit for Tamms
Year Ten featuring the great slide guitar
player and blues singer Elmore James,
Jr. and the incredible improvisational
jazz trio of Jaimie Branch (trumpet),
Toby Summerfield (guitar), and Marc
Riordan (drums).

With the support of prisoner advocates,
we are meeting with legislators and will
hold information-only hearings about
Tamms in the Prison Reform Committee
of the Illinois House of Representatives.
The hearings will take place on
**Monday, April 28, 2008 from 10am to
4pm in the James R. Thompson
Center (100 W. Randolph, Chicago).**
We need as many people as possible to
to attend this hearing and contact their
legislators about Tamms.

In fact, the Tamms Year Ten campaign
urges everyone reading this article to get
involved in any way you can. If you are
on the inside, urge family members to
contact us and get active with the
campaign. We cannot achieve these
goals without family members. Explain

**Continued on Next Page...**
Lost?
Wanna Help But Don’t Know Where to Begin?

Here are some ways you can help
the many organizations committed
to positive reform

1. Subscribe to Stateville Speaks
$10.00 keeps you informed and us going. Inmates, encourage family members to subscribe

2. Join the N.I.V. Mission
The N.I.V. is a lobbying force. With a large number of voting members, N.I.V. can help influence legislators

3. Get on the Web
www.YEAR_TEN.ORG  www.LT3P.org
www.IllinoisPrisonTalk.com

4. VOTE
Get Registered TODAY. Call 312.603.0906

5. SHOW UP
Attend announced HJR80 meetings, CER meetings and TAMMS Events. Not getting an invitation? Join the mailing list by subscribing to Stateville Speaks!

TAMMS YEAR TEN CONTACT
Go to www.YearTen.org for more information.
Contact us at YearTen@riseup.net or 773-596-1950.
Write us at Tamms Poetry Committee, PO BOX 47750, Chicago IL 60647.

TAMMS YEAR TEN CAMPAIGN ENDORSERS
8th Day Center for Justice
American Friends Service Committee–Chicago
Black People Against Police Torture
Campaign to End the Death Penalty
Chicago Anarchist Black Cross
Chicago County Fair
Chicagoland Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights
Citizens For Earned Release
Coalition to Reduce Recidivism
Critical Resistance Chicago
Education Justice Project, Urbana-Champaign
Illinois Institute for Community Law
Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago
Midwest Books to Prisoners
National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression–Chicago
National Lawyers Guild–Chicago
Progressive Community Center, The People’s Church, Rev. B. Herbert Martin
Saving Our Sons Ministries
Stateville Speaks
STOPMAX/American Friends

Tamms Year Ten Campaign Cont.
how important it is—and tell them that the time to do something is now. For those on the outside, news and information about Year Ten events is available online at www.YearTen.org or by calling 773-596-1950. Tamms Year Ten has at least a dozen ways to volunteer your time and expertise. Please organize your own events in the rest of Chicago and the rest of the state! You can also donate to the campaign with a check to “Year Ten” or on the website—every dollar is well-spent and we have many expenses coming up that we can’t cover.

This special issue of Stateville Speaks is devoted to Tamms on the occasion of this anniversary. However, please understand that Tamms Year Ten considers Tamms to be a symbol—not an exception—for what is wrong with the Illinois prison system. Other prisons also have dehumanizing conditions and equally destructive methods of solitary confinement and human warehousing. Concerned citizens, family members, and prisoners have to work in solidarity across these issues to promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. Together, we can create the wave of reform needed for a humane and effective criminal justice system in Illinois.
Students Visit Tamms  
Brianna Bedard and Patrick Moore

Over the past summer a youth group from the Universalist Unitarian Church of Elgin visited Tamms Supermax Correctional Facility. We consist mainly of high school and college students. Nancy, a friend of mine, had been visiting the prison for two years, and our group decided that it would be an interesting experience to visit a few of the prisoners at Tamms. The visit turned out to be much more than we expected.

After seemingly endless forms and hassles, seven of us were finally on our way early in the morning last July. We were all fairly excited and somewhat nervous during the long car ride to the prison. When we arrived, our vehicle was promptly searched. We were then brought into the facility where we filled out another form. After that we passed through a metal detector, and we were each taken to a separate room to be physically searched for weapons or drugs.

After this, our group split off to visit two different prisoners. I and three others visited a middle-aged man for two hours, but it felt like it was not more than twenty minutes. This new friend of ours had not had a visitor in almost seven years. His excitement and nervousness to see us was very apparent and touching.

After the visit, a member of our group said, “The prisoner I visited acted completely unlike any of the prisoners portrayed in the media. He is smart, compassionate, and completely remorseful. Listening to his story made you think about the situation he is in and his options. He does not have many options and he is now paying for a crime he committed years ago with the rest of his life. The tactics used to keep him under control seemed dehumanizing and unnecessary. It makes you wonder who, if anyone, should be subjected to such punishment. I am amazed he is not insane.”

Dave, another member of the group, visited a different prisoner but had a similar reaction. “The man I visited is intelligent and compassionate. I would feel comfortable having him as a neighbor.”

We were all moved by the remorse and regard that the prisoners had. It made us wonder about the necessity of such an extreme program as a supermax facility. While people argue and protest about the treatment of animals, some of those same people choose not to see the treatment of people in these prisons as unethical. I leave you with a thought: If people are considered evolved enough to be held accountable for their actions, then aren’t they evolved enough to be reformed in the consequence of their mistakes?”

Typical Maximum Security Holding Cell
[untitled]

I see myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself. I scream for this tortured battered soul but nobody seems to hear.

Stone walls, steel doors, the solitude. I search for their meaning. Does it always have to be so hard? Must I die feeling alone? Within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself.

Each day passes, tick tock, I look in the mirror I see an old man I do not know, this is what time has done to me. Old and faded like my memories of times past. Tick tock. The moment is now past within myself within myself. Never truly understanding why I’ve done what I’ve done. It’s a constant battle—am I sane, only time will be the judge. Does it matter anymore?

A tear escapes and I wipe it away before anyone sees. Remaining years, have mercy and pass by quickly. Another tear escapes and I don’t care anymore. Tears on my pillow not a smile on my face. And I see myself within myself within myself within myself within myself within myself.

I concentrate on its hum; maybe the answer lies there; what a surprise, my visualization has once again deceived me; I turn and look around, and memories start to flood my mind; I try to pick any one of them at random, but they all come up empty; this too is futile.

I ask for professional help, yet this too is futile, for I am at fault, regardless of my opinions or concerns; so I keep it to myself; maybe they’ll stop pointing fingers; yet this too is futile, for I am a created monster; I tell myself this isn’t so; I have my own life, yet I am deceived once again, for I have been stripped of all life; only a river of tears reminds me of life.

Yet this too is futile, for my vision has deceived me, for only a life can see, only a life can feel, only a life can answer me, only life can keep me human; yet I cannot live that life; for the past two years my life has stopped; I no longer have life; I can only live without seeing, without feeling—this is to live without life.

—to live without life

as I sit down and speak to neighbors, their echo answers me; as I speak, I visualize the gestures a human being would do when speaking to another fellow being; it is not enough to visualize, so I look in the mirror to assure myself, yet without surprise all I see is a shadow; my eyesight blurs, as a river flows through them; I ask myself, is this what I was created for?

as I hug myself, I realize that this too is just a futile vision, for I do not feel myself; so I try to talk, hoping someone will hear my echo, but only a vent answers me, so I

—a prisoner at tamms
Upcoming TAMMS Year Ten Events

March 1–Saturday–10:30AM. A talk on “Human Contact Deprivation”
Sacred Heart Parish, 337 S. Ottawa Street, Joliet, IL 60436

March 3–Monday–4PM. Press conference and spoken-word event
Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
The University of Illinois at Chicago, 800 S. Halsted (M/C 051),
Chicago, IL 60607

March 8–Saturday–6PM-8:30PM. Tamms Anniversary Letter-writing Event
Mess Hall. 6932 N Glenwood Ave, Chicago 60626

March 10–Monday–10PM. Chicago Peace Party at Danny’s
Benefit for Tamms Year Ten Campaign—half of bar proceeds go to our campaign.
Danny’s Bar. 1951 W Dickens Ave, Chicago, IL 60614

March 14—Friday–8PM. The Tradeshow. Live performance installation by RATIO and Chicago Arts District
1945 S. Halsted, Ste 101, Chicago, IL
(also performed on 3/16 at 2PM and as a Tamms benefit on 4/25 at 8PM)

March 15–Saturday–9PM. A Benefit For Tamms Year Ten
Featuring Elmore James Jr. and Rupert (Jaimie Branch/Marc Riordan/Toby Summerfield).
The Hideout. 1354 W. Wabansia Ave. Chicago, IL 60622

April 17–Thursday–6PM. Gene Siskel Film Center
You Don’t Remember The Time You Do: Moments in the Lives of Prisoners
Space Ghost by Laurie Jo Reynolds and In Loving Memory by Rob Todd.
164 North State Street, Chicago, IL 60601

April 26–Saturday–11AM to 4PM. Freedom School Communiversity
Education on the prison-industrial complex. Participants will write letters to Tamms prisoners.
719 S. State St., Suite 3N, Chicago, IL 60605

April 28—Monday—10am-4pm Prison Reform Committee Hearings on Tamms
James R. Thompson Center, 100 W. Randolph, Chicago, IL 60601

April 29—Tuesday—4PM to 5:30PM. Northwestern University Lecture
Northwestern University Center for International and Comparative Studies “Torture in the Era of Democracy” series lecture. Former Tamms prisoner Reginald Akkeem Berry and attorney Jean Maclean Snyder will speak about Tamms.

SUPERMAX SUBSCRIPTIONS
The art group Temporary Services (who published Prisoners Inventions) are collaborating with The Tamms Poetry Committee and Sara Ross on a magazines-for-all-Tamms-prisoners drive.
Please check the website for updates and changes. www.YearTen.org