



[Databases selected:](#) ProQuest Newspapers

'Super-max' prison called a fate worse than death; [F3,M1,L1,F1,C3,D1 Edition]

Don Thompson Daily Herald State Government Writer. Daily Herald. Arlington Heights, Ill.: Mar 16, 1999. pg. 4

Abstract (Summary)

Amnesty International contends Tamms Correctional Center violates international human rights accords. A pending lawsuit charges incarceration there amounts to cruel and unusual punishment for mentally ill inmates. And though a prison watchdog group's report this week will give the prison a passing grade, the group's president said death row is downright cushy compared to conditions at Tamms.

[Andrew] Kokoraleis is to be flown there today by helicopter from Pontiac Correctional Center's death row, journeying to a prison so far south it's virtually in Kentucky. Barring an 11th-hour reprieve, shortly after midnight tonight the Villa Park man will be the first to die in Illinois' new death chamber, constructed last year when the state opened its \$73 million super-max prison.

"By sending people to Tamms for execution, that whole process is removed from public view," said Nancy Bothne, Midwest regional director for Amnesty International. She and other critics complain the prison is so remote it is difficult for death penalty opponents or the media to attend.

Full Text (749 words)

Copyright Paddock Publications Mar 16, 1999

Conditions are so harsh at Illinois' new "super-maximum" prison, in critics' view, that DuPage County ritual killer Andrew Kokoraleis may be lucky he's only going there to die.

Amnesty International contends Tamms Correctional Center violates international human rights accords. A pending lawsuit charges incarceration there amounts to cruel and unusual punishment for mentally ill inmates. And though a prison watchdog group's report this week will give the prison a passing grade, the group's president said death row is downright cushy compared to conditions at Tamms.

Kokoraleis is to be flown there today by helicopter from Pontiac Correctional Center's death row, journeying to a prison so far south it's virtually in Kentucky. Barring an 11th-hour reprieve, shortly after midnight tonight the Villa Park man will be the first to die in Illinois' new death chamber, constructed last year when the state opened its \$73 million super-max prison.

"By sending people to Tamms for execution, that whole process is removed from public view," said Nancy Bothne, Midwest regional director for Amnesty International. She and other critics complain the prison is so remote it is difficult for death penalty opponents or the media to attend.

At Tamms, the cells and the exercise yards are virtually stripped bare.

There is no recreation equipment in the 15-by-30-foot yards, which are surrounded by 12-foot concrete walls and monitored by closed-circuit cameras. Inmates go there one at a time, to block contact with other inmates. Similarly, up to five monthly visits are conducted through glass walls to prohibit contact, though critics say Tamms is so isolated few visitors make the trip.

"This is a prison that houses inmates in such a way that they never touch another human being except when a guard puts his hand on their arm to shackle them," said Jean Maclean Snyder of the University of Chicago Law School's MacArthur Justice Center.

Inmates can call out to each other, so they conduct aerobics classes sight-unseen. And some make chess sets and play games by calling out the moves from cell to cell. There's no TV, no access to telephones, no smoking, no educational programming.

"It's a bleak existence," said Illinois Department of Corrections spokesman Nic Howell. "It's not there as a rehabilitative tool."

Rather, it's designed to be so spartan that inmates in other prisons will behave rather than risk being sent there for a minimum of a year in segregation. The isolation is so complete that inmates will undergo a monthlong transition period before they are sent back to other prisons, so they can learn to live with people again.

And it's working, Howell contends. As proof, he notes the number of assaults on staff and inmates throughout the prison system has fallen by a third since the prison opened and by nearly half since construction began.

Snyder, who filed suit in January on behalf of mentally ill inmates at Tamms, counters that there is no long-term proof that it helps and anecdotal evidence that it makes the mentally ill even more destructive to themselves and others.

By contrast, those on death row can smoke, have access to televisions and telephones, and are taken to the exercise yard in groups of up to 10, where they have access to basketball hoops and weight-training equipment.

"Other than that, you're sitting there looking at a death sentence. I'd say those on death row have it a little better," said Michael Mahoney, president of the John Howard Association prison watchdog group. "They have access to more things than are those who are in Tamms on a disciplinary basis."

Mahoney believes there should be studies in Illinois and other states on the long-term effect of such isolation.

The report Mahoney's organization will release this week suggests such things as allowing inmates more than the current three showers a week, putting in some exercise equipment, providing some educational programming and holding disciplinary hearings before transferring inmates to Tamms rather than after they've already been moved.

And his organization concurs with the MacArthur Justice Center that the big problem is with mentally ill inmates who can't stand the physical and psychological deprivation. Both watchdog groups want prescreening to weed out the mentally ill from going to Tamms in the first place, plus more treatment for those who are there.

Howell said the department already has more mental health professionals available per inmate at Tamms than at any other prison, but is reviewing the groups' recommendations.

[Illustration]

Caption: GRAPHIC: Super-max prison called super harsh GRAPHIC/MAP: Tamms Correctional Center/Paducah

Indexing (document details)

Author(s): Don Thompson Daily Herald State Government Writer
Section: NEWS
Publication title: Daily Herald. Arlington Heights, Ill.: Mar 16, 1999. pg. 4
Source type: Newspaper
ProQuest document ID: 39800600
Text Word Count 749
Document URL: <http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/pqdweb?did=39800600&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=13392&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

Copyright © 2008 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

