



# Solitary Watch

News from a Nation in Lockdown  
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In the United States today, at least 80,000 prisoners are in some form of isolated confinement,<sup>1</sup> including some 25,000 in supermax prisons.<sup>2</sup> Solitary confinement goes by many names, including administrative segregation, disciplinary confinement, security housing, and restricted housing, but it normally consists of 22- to 24-hour lockdown in a small cell. Terms in solitary confinement often extend to months, years, or decades.

Solitary confinement has been found to cause serious psychological damage. Studies have also shown that it increases recidivism and fails to reduce prison violence.<sup>1</sup>

Solitary confinement is also expensive, in large part because of added staffing costs. One study estimated that the average per-cell cost of housing an inmate in a supermax prison is \$75,000, as opposed to \$25,000 for an inmate in the general population.<sup>3</sup>

While many states do not publish data on the costs of isolated confinement in their prisons, a survey of available figures clearly reveals the high price of solitary.

## California

With over 1,100 inmates in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) and 400 more in the Administrative Segregation Unit (ASU), Pelican Bay State Prison has a yearly budget of \$180 million. For 2010-2011, the annual costs per inmate were as follows:

- \$70,641 per SHU inmate
- \$77,740 per ASU inmate
- \$58,324 per general population inmate<sup>4</sup>

According to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations, the average length of time spent in the Pelican Bay SHU is 6.8 years.<sup>5</sup> This means the total cost of holding each inmate in the SHU is on average \$480,358. Housing the same inmate in the general population would save \$83,733.

Some 2,200 additional prisoners are housed in SHUs at Corcoran State Prison and CCI Calipatria.<sup>5</sup> This brings the statewide total in SHU confinement to approximately 3,700. Assuming costs are consistent across state prisons, at \$12,317 more per inmate, the added cost of SHU confinement comes to \$45.6 million annually.

In addition, a 2009 report from the California Office of the Inspector General estimated “the annual correctional staff cost of a standard ASU bed to be at least \$14,600 more than the equivalent general population bed. For the 8,878 ASU

beds statewide, this additional cost equates to nearly \$130 million a year.”<sup>6</sup>

Taking in the costs of SHU and ASU combined, solitary confinement costs California taxpayers an additional \$175 million a year.

## Illinois

Calculations carried out by reporters at the *Belleville News-Democrat* found that it costs \$92,000 per year to hold an inmate in solitary confinement at Illinois’s Tamms Correctional Center. The figure is two to three times higher than the cost of keeping an inmate at the state’s other maximum-security prisons.<sup>7</sup>

According to the 2009 Annual Report of the Illinois Department of Corrections, Tamms held 417 inmates, 243 of whom were in solitary confinement. In 2009, total expenditures at Tamms amounted to over \$28 million. By comparison, Taylorville Correctional Center spent \$25 million with nearly three times the population of Tamms (1201). In 2010, following a reduction of Tamms’s supermax population (from 243 to 208), costs fell to \$25 million.<sup>8</sup>

## Colorado

According to figures compiled by the ACLU of Colorado, in 2010 it cost \$14,933 to \$21,485 more per inmate, per year to hold someone in administrative segregation in the state’s supermax prisons than in a regular maximum security prison (\$42,642-\$48,403 vs. \$26,918 to \$27,709).<sup>9</sup>

With 1,400 prisoners in administrative segregation statewide,<sup>9</sup> the additional annual cost of solitary confinement in Colorado that year exceeded \$20 million.

## Other States

In 2003, the cost of housing a level 5 Administrative Maximum, or “supermax,” inmate at Ohio State Penitentiary was \$149 daily and \$54,385 a year. The cost of housing a maximum-security inmate was \$101 a day and \$26,865 a year. For general population inmates the cost was \$63 a day or \$22,995 a year--less than half the cost of an Administrative Segregation inmate.<sup>2</sup>

In 2002, the cost of housing an inmate in the general population in Texas was \$42.46 per day. The cost of housing a prisoner in administrative segregation was 45 percent higher, at \$61.63 per day.<sup>10</sup> At the time, Texas held approximately 9,000 prisoners in administrative segregation, with an additional yearly cost to taxpayers of almost \$63 million.



In the year 2000, it cost three times more to house an inmate in the supermax Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center than in the general population.<sup>11</sup>

## Federal Prisons

The Federal Bureau of Prisons holds more than 11,000 prisoners in some form of segregation, including about 400 in its supermax prison, the U.S. Penitentiary Administrative Maximum, or ADX, in Florence, Colorado.<sup>12</sup> The BOP says it does not know the cost of holding an inmate in ADX.

A Freedom of Information Act request from Solitary Watch for the annual cost of housing a prisoner at ADX yielded the following response: "The BOP does not collect separate or specific data held in Administrative custody or at USP Admin Max Florence. These costs are included in the general per capita costs for the applicable facility. Since the prisons at Florence make up a Federal Correctional Complex [which also has maximum, medium, and minimum security inmates], the operating costs are based on all complex operations, shared services and facility expenses at this site."

## Construction Costs

In addition to higher operating costs, supermax prisons have consistently higher construction costs than other types of facilities—two to three times higher, according to one report, than a maximum-security prison.<sup>2</sup>

Pelican Bay State Prison was built in 1989 at a cost of \$230 million<sup>13</sup> to hold 1056 inmates,<sup>14</sup> or, \$217,803 per cell.

The Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center was built at a cost of \$21 million (in 1989 dollars) to house 288 inmates, or, a cost of over \$72,000 per bed.<sup>15</sup>

Wisconsin's Boscobel supermax facility was built to house 500 inmates at a cost of \$47.5 million (in 1990 dollars), or over \$95,000 per bed.<sup>15</sup>

The federal supermax, ADX Florence, was completed in 1994 at a cost of \$60 million—over \$122,000 for each of its 490 beds.<sup>16</sup>

Tamms Correctional Center cost \$73 million to build in 1998 and was designed to hold 500 inmates. This gives a construction price tag of approximately \$146,000 per bed.<sup>17</sup>

Ohio State Penitentiary, likewise constructed to house 500 supermax inmates, cost taxpayers \$50 million to build, or \$100,000 per bed.<sup>17</sup>

## Reforms Lead to Savings

Spurred by litigation, legislation, leadership, and local activism, a handful of states have recently taken steps to reduce the number of prisoners they hold in solitary—a move that has clear fiscal benefits.

In recent years, Mississippi has reduced the number of prisoners it holds in solitary from 1,000 to about 150, and closed down its supermax unit. According to the ACLU, the reforms are saving Mississippi's taxpayers an estimated \$8 million a year.<sup>18</sup>

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