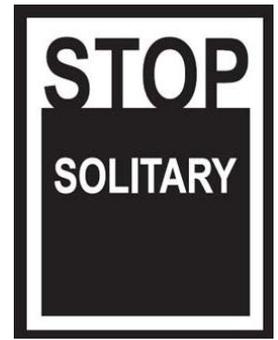


# PAYING the PRICE for SOLITARY CONFINEMENT



Over the past few decades, United States corrections systems have increasingly relied on the use of solitary confinement as a tool to manage certain incarcerated populations. Prisoners in solitary confinement remain alone in their cells for 22-24 hours per day – for months, years, and even decades at a time. This practice, which has been shown to be inhumane and ineffective, is also extremely costly. Though limited nationwide data exists, state data suggests that the cost of housing a prisoner in solitary confinement is 2-3 times that of housing a prisoner in general population.<sup>1</sup>

## Why is Solitary More Expensive?

Holding prisoners in solitary confinement is resource-intensive from start to finish. Below are two of the biggest costs associated with the use of solitary confinement.

**Construction:** To accommodate the vast numbers of prisoners kept in solitary confinement, a new kind of prison has emerged. So-called “supermax” prisons hold entire prison populations in extreme isolation and are currently operating in 44 states and the federal government<sup>2</sup>. Because of their reliance on single-cell confinement and enhanced security technology, these facilities can cost two or three times as much as conventional facilities to construct.<sup>3</sup>

**Staffing:** Ongoing operating costs for isolation units and facilities are also inflated as a result of more demanding staffing requirements. Prisoners in solitary confinement are usually required to be escorted by two or more officers any time they leave their cells, and work that in other prisons would be performed by prisoners (such as cooking and cleaning) must be done by paid staff. Because



held in solitary confinement.<sup>4</sup>

## How Much More Does It Cost?

The high costs of solitary confinement have been documented by many states as well as the federal government. Below are some examples:

### States:

- **Arizona:** A 2007 estimate from Arizona put the annual cost of holding a prisoner in solitary confinement at approximately \$50,000, compared to about \$20,000 for the average prisoner.<sup>5</sup>
- **California:** For 2010-2011, inmates in isolation at Pelican Bay State Prison’s Administrative Segregation Unit cost \$77,740 annually, while inmates in general population cost \$58,324.<sup>6</sup> Statewide, taxpayers pay an additional \$175 million annually to keep prisoners in solitary confinement.<sup>7</sup>
- **Connecticut:** In Connecticut, housing a prisoner in solitary confinement costs an average of twice as much as housing a prisoner in general population.<sup>8</sup>
- **Maryland:** In Maryland, the average cost of housing a prisoner in segregation is three times greater than that of housing a prisoner in general population.<sup>9</sup>
- **Ohio:** The average cost of housing a prisoner in segregation is twice as high as that of housing a prisoner in general population.<sup>10</sup>
- **Texas:** In Texas the cost of housing a prisoner in solitary confinement is 45% greater than that of housing a prisoner in general population.<sup>11</sup>

**Federal:** In 2013, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that segregation units in federal facilities are significantly more expensive to operate than traditional maximum-security units. Incarceration in a federal supermax facility cost 153% more than incarceration in general population in 2013.<sup>12</sup> In that year, the daily cost per inmate at the federal supermax facility ADX Florence is approximately \$216.12, compared with \$85.74 for the general population.<sup>13</sup> This disparity is

largely due to the high staffing needs: at one federal prison, the correctional officer-to-prisoner ratio was three times higher in the isolation unit as in the general population.<sup>14</sup> In addition, construction costs for ADX Florence were \$60 million – over \$122,000 per bed.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these enormous costs, states and the federal government continue to invest scarce taxpayer dollars in constructing supermax prisons and enforcing solitary confinement conditions. Yet there are stark new fiscal realities facing our communities today and for the foreseeable future. Both state and federal governments confront reduced revenue and mounting debt that are leading to severe cuts in essential public services like health and education. Given these harsh new realities, it is unquestionably time to ask whether we should continue to rely on solitary confinement and supermax prisons despite the high fiscal and human costs they impose.

### What Can We Do About it?

Solitary confinement is inhumane, ineffective, and overused. Many states have already reaped the financial benefits of reducing their isolated populations – here are a few examples:

**MISSISSIPPI** closed a unit in 2010 that once held 1000 prisoners in isolation,<sup>16</sup> resulting in a savings of an estimated \$8 million per year.<sup>17</sup>

**ILLINOIS** closed Tamms supermax facility in 2013, reportedly saving the state approximately \$26 million per year.<sup>18</sup>

**COLORADO** closed a 316-bed administrative segregation facility, which was projected to save \$13.6 million in Fiscal Year 2013-14.<sup>19</sup>

***Learn more at [www.aclu.org/stopsolitary](http://www.aclu.org/stopsolitary)***

<sup>1</sup> Daniel P. Mears & Jamie Watson, *Towards a Fair and Balanced Assessment of Supermax Prisons*, 23 JUST. Q. 233, 260 (2006), available at <https://starcafe.org/hj/library/towards%20a%20fair%20and%20balanced%20assessment%20of%20supermax%20prisons.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> DANIEL P. MEARS, URBAN INST., EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPERMAX PRISONS 4 (2006), available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/211971.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> MEARS & WATSON, *supra* note 1, at 260.

<sup>4</sup> DANIEL P. MEARS & WILLIAM D. BALES, SUPERMAX INCARCERATION AND RECIDIVISM, 47 CRIMINOLOGY 1131, 1135 (2009), available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2009.00171.x/abstract> (abstract only).

<sup>5</sup> CAROLINE ISAACS & MATTHEW LOWEN, AM. FRIENDS SERV. COMM., BURIED ALIVE: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN ARIZONA'S PRISONS AND JAILS 4 (2007), available at <https://afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicaactions.net/files/documents/Buried%20Alive.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2011). Pelican Bay: [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/COMIO/Uploadfile/pdfs/Pelican\\_Bay.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/COMIO/Uploadfile/pdfs/Pelican_Bay.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> SAL RODRIGUEZ, SOLITARY WATCH, FACT SHEET: THE HIGH COST OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT 1 (2012).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 26

<sup>9</sup> Mears, *supra* note 2, at 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 26

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 33

<sup>12</sup> Alison Shames, Jessa Wilcox & Ram Subramanian, VERA Institute of Justice, Solitary confinement: Common Misconceptions and Emerging Safe Alternatives 25 (2015), available at <http://www.vera.org/pubs/solitary-confinement-misconceptions-safe-alternatives>.

<sup>13</sup> US GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE (GAO), IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN BUREAU OF PRISONS' MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SEGREGATED HOUSING 32 (2013).

<sup>14</sup> GAO, *supra* note 12, at 30.

<sup>15</sup> Fox News (2006), Supermax Prisons: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,194306,00.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See TERRY A. KUPERS, ET AL., BEYOND SUPERMAX ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION: MISSISSIPPI'S EXPERIENCE RETHINKING PRISON CLASSIFICATION AND CREATING ALTERNATIVE MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS, 36 CRIM. JUST. & BEHAV. 1037, 1041 (2009); JOHN BUNTIN, EXODUS: HOW AMERICA'S REDDEST STATE – AND ITS MOST NOTORIOUS PRISON – BECAME A MODEL OF CORRECTIONS REFORM, 23 GOVERNING 20, 27 (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Transcript of Proceedings at 8, *Presley v. Epps*, No. 4:05-CV-00148-JAD (N.D. Miss. Aug. 2, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.sj-r.com/x221030937/Heather-Rice-Close-Tamms-limit-use-of-solitary-confinement>

<sup>19</sup> News Release, Department of Corrections, *The Department of Corrections Announces the Closure of Colorado State Penitentiary II* (March 19, 2012), available at <http://www.doc.state.co.us/sites/default/files/Press%20release%20CSP%20II%20close%20%20Feb%201%202013.pdf>.