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February 22, 2013

Governor Pat Quinn
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: Conditions at Pontiac, North Cell House, 6 Gallery

Dear Governor Quinn:

Please refer to my letter to you of February 4, 2013. We write once again concerning the conditions under which men transferred from Tamms to Pontiac are living. Enclosed are excerpts from letters from a number of such individual prisoners describing their conditions of confinement and grievances.

As we indicated in our letter previous letter, we encountered many of the same problems at the Ohio State Penitentiary but, in some instances, not to the same degree. The letters we received describe the problems with a specificity that adds credence to the allegations, for example, of vermin infestation and filth. (See LETTERS FROM PONTIAC CORRECTIONAL CENTER, page 1, III.)

Among the letters we received from Pontiac, we have one describing inadequate mental health attention to a schizophrenic who had been under mental health supervision since the age of three (see LETTERS, page 6, February 10), and another prisoner who described the difficulty of being housed with prisoners who are mentally ill: the noise-banging and screaming by the mentally ill-interferes with his sleep and composure (LETTERS, pages 2-3, VI). We too found that the incarceration of the mentally ill under supermaximum security confinement created hardships not only for those who were mentally ill but also for those who were housed with them. Suicidal attempts by some prompted some others to inflict harm upon themselves.

Inadequate ventilation, aggravated by the use of chemical agents in the housing area, is particularly oppressive for individuals who have breathing problems. (See LETTERS, page 2, IV and V; see also, page 4, #2.)

Prisoners do not understand why, when they have not engaged in misconduct, privileges that they previously earned at Tamms are being denied at Pontiac. (See LETTERS, page 3, Offender's Grievance, #11; page 5, February 8, middle of page.) Prisoners should not be subjected to "unwritten rules." (See LETTERS, page 4, #18.) They should have access to forms and to active and fair consideration of their grievances. They should be able to have confidence that if they follow the rules they will be rewarded by additional privileges or confinement at a lower security level.

It is not in the interest of anyone, prisoners or those who are responsible for their supervision, to condone such conditions or to fail to address them. We urge you to give this matter your personal attention until improvement is under way.

Sincerely,

Alice Lynd

Alice Lynd

Staughton Lynd

Staughton Lynd

Enclosure: LETTERS FROM PONTIAC CORRECTIONAL CENTER

LETTERS FROM PONTIAC CORRECTIONAL CENTER (lightly edited)
P. O. Box 99, Pontiac, IL 61764

“Condition[s] of Confinement”

February 11, 2013
North House, Seg 6 Gallery

I.

[Showers]

The walls in the showers on North House 6 gallery have months if not years of built up soap scum (green and brown) and calcium build up. The shower area is approx 3' x 3', so small that I can't help but have different parts of my body rub against the walls while I'm washing up. Said scum & unidentifiable substances come off the walls onto my body, causing me to get sores, itchy rashes on my skin! I have never had any problems with rashes until using said shower. . . .

II.

Unreasonable Exposure to Communicable Diseases [nail clippers not sanitized]

The requirement that inmates in the N-cell house on 6 Tamms gallery all use the same fingernail clippers without them being properly sanitized between uses, exposes myself and others to communicable diseases such as Hepatitis C, HIV, AIDS, etc. It is very easy to contemplate that an inmate will transfer blood to said fingernail clippers while attempting to remove an ingrown toenail or fingernail. If the inmate using the fingernail clippers after him also has an ingrown toenail or fingernail, there will be a transfer of blood and body fluid. . . .

III.

Extreme Vermin Infestation [and filth]

The entire N-cell house has an extreme vermin infestation, especially on Tamms 6 gallery where they live and breed in the heaters and food cart that brings up our food trays! Since I've been housed in Pontiac Corr. Center in the N-cell house 6 gallery, I have seen hundreds of mice! They run around on the gallery even during the day time. They come in my cell at all hours of the day, even while I'm walking around. . . . Every morning when I wake up there's mice feces all over my floor! I've seen numerous mice running in and out and around 6 gallery heating units . . . and along the walls. There was a small pink baby mouse lying dead by the heater (i.e. I guess the heat got 'em) that every one (inmates and c/o's) witnessed. The door in the middle of 6 gallery has mice feces . . . and nesting material falling out of the walls indicating that they are nesting there as well. Then come to find out it's not material from the walls! It's . . . [ant hill or] rat poison! All on the floor like food. . . .

. . . Since my placement at Pontiac Corr. Center [December 23, 2012] I have not been provided with any cleaning supplies to clean my cell with, other than 1/2 cup of green liquid soap. I was told by the gallery c/o that I will not be provided with any other

items--no sponge, no toilet brush, no cleaning rag (i.e., they write you up for rip towels) nothing.

I live in the N-house on 6 gallery and it is extremely filthy. It is never swept or mopped as it should be. [C/Os] don't pick up trash like they should, they leave it for the next shift to get. Cameras will show there's trash, food (that's being thrown from Pontiac inmates) and rodent feces on the gallery floor, in the corners up against the heaters and walls. On December 25th 2012 in the P.m. hours there was a flood on 8 gallery (above us). The water was swept over into 6 gallery where the drain[s] are located. It was then that the smell hit me hard!! The smell stayed for 4 1/2 days on the windows and walls. The failure to provide for and require even the most minimal housekeeping and cleaning in the N-cell house has resulted in an unnecessarily filthy and denigrating enviro[n]ment that threatens myself and others' physical and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, these filthy conditions must be a contributing factor to the rodent infestation described above. . . .

IV.

Inadequate Ventilation

The vent that's in the back of my cell is truly filthy and completely clogged with dust, mold and other unidentifiable substances that prevent inadequate air circulation causing a health risk to myself and other[s] who suffer from preexisting health condition[s]. I have "a chronic lung disorder" (asthma) that I can and will have episodes of attacks that I'll be/have tightness in my chest[,] a labored of breathing and coughing. Every time chemical agents (mostly ma[c]e) are used anywhere in the cell house (or near my cell) the fumes enter my cell but cannot exit because of said clogged vent and plexiglass/shields that isn't removable at all. This causes my eyes to burn and I cough to the point of vomiting. . . .

V.

Placement of Solid Front Cell

. . . Prior to coming to Pontiac Corr. Center, I was housed at Tamms Supermax facility for 6 1/2 months. Since the year 2012 I was housed in a[n] open front cell, perforated steel cell. Upon my arrival at Pontiac C.C. I was place[d] in a cell with a solid plexiglass front and was told I would remain behind one for the entirety of my time in Pontiac C.C. This solid front cell has effectively stood any and all ventilation in my cell as described above. This lack [of adequate] ventilation is causing me to suffer from breathing difficulty, congestion and it feels like something is always caught in my throat. I feel like I'm in a coffin! This plexiglass also effectively prevents me from receiving medical attention. I call out to the E.M.T. but they keep on walking. They either can't hear me because of the solid front glass, or is simply ignoring me?! . . .

VI.

Placing Mentally Ill Inmates with Those Who Are Not Mentally Ill Inmates

. . . I have noticed that there are numerous inmates in my general vicinity that are exhibiting the symptoms associated with mental illness. . . . I have smelled human feces

and urin[e]. There has been a flood with human excrements in the water and continuous screaming for hours on end, arguing and banging 24 hours a day! They will bang seven days a week! The behavior of these mentally ill inmates that are not mentally ill is causing the latter group to suffer from the effects of the mentally ill. I have not slept more than 5 hour/scattered hours a night since my placement here at Pontiac C.C.

VII.

Excessive Noise

As described above, I have not slept more than 5 scattered hours a night since my placement here at Pontiac Corr. Center. The "excessive noise" in my enviro[n]ment is causing me to suffer greatly, "on edge," and "argumentative" which I don't often do with security staff due to my complete exhaustion. . . .

Offender's Grievance, Illinois Department of Corrections (no date or name of grievant)

1. Remove the solid plexiglass cell front from my cell.
2. Provide me with proper cleaning supplies to clean my cell and toilet with, i.e. sponges, scrubpads, toilet brush, soap, etc.
3. Do something about the rodent infestation in the N-cell house
4. Sweep and mop 6 gallery every day with windows, ledge and walls every other day.
5. Provide me with sterilized fingernail clippers at least once a week.
6. Stop using the f[r?]ont cage on the shower stall. There is no need to lock me in the shower when I'm already in the cell.
7. I cannot use "Magic Shave." It burns my face and neck and it states right on the tube "for men of color." I'm a black man and I still can't use it at all. Provide me with the use of a "razor" once a week, as we had in "Tamms Supermax," or provide me with weekly barber services for the purpose of shaving.
8. Provide me with regularly scheduled barber services for the purpose of getting my monthly haircut.
9. Provide me with a security approved thin, flex mirror via commissary.
10. Return any and all of my hygiene/grooming supplies that were allowed at Tamms Supermax but was confiscated by Pontiac C.C., i.e. hair grease, deodorant, toothpaste, shampoo, lotion, etc.
11. Restore any Behavior Incentive Program (B.I.P.) privileges that I had earned at Tamms Supermax, but were revoked by Pontiac C.C. for no reason, i.e., return my cassette tapes and allow me to purchase limited food items and coffee from the commissary spending limit, i.e., legal white envelopes, hygiene items, bedding, clothing, etc.
12. Put plain white envelopes on the commissary and allow the unlimited purchase thereof.
13. Increase the limit on how [many] bars of soap I can buy from the commissary from 2 to 4 a month.
14. Investigate the failure to address inmates in Pontiac grievances filed at P.C.C.
15. Provide me with forms when I need them, such as grievance forms, request slips, law library request, legal box request, etc.

16. Provide me with cloth[e]s that are adequate for the winter, i.e. thicker jumpsuits, or allow me to [have] winter boots or allow me to wear two pair of socks, a winter cap, gloves, two T-shirt[s], etc.

17. Allow me to possess the equivalent of two property boxes of personal property (or one big box). The "no" small box policy you have now is unacceptable, using plastic bags are inadequate. And,

18. Stop the enforcement of unwritten rules and policies.

This was respectfully submitted

c.c. Warden, File, Ala[n] Mills, Laurie Jo Reynolds, . . . UpTown People['s] Law Center

[Another Statement]

Issue #1, Deprivation of

(A) Property/legal work/hygiene/clean clothes to supply for the duration of being stripped of property/reading material/fan/correspondence allowing us to access law/grievance procedure, family, business transactions, etc./books/mags allowing us to learn in capacity of "threat to the security and safety of the institution"/they "strip us out" for violations not dealing w/property.

(B) Cleaning supplies/sanitized/sanitary finger nail clippers, hair trimmers used by uncertified barbers/brooms, mops, fags, bleach, etc.

(C) The ability to try to resolve an issue by having access to a superior officer such as Lt. Or Major. We go through chain of command and are pressured into dangerous or [drastic] actions leading to punishment.

(D) We get Magic Shave and no razors. Not all can use Magic Shave.

Issue #2, Excessive Force

(A) Excessive force such as whole cans of Mace/OC spray used by Lt., Majors, and sergeants before tactical team is called.

(B) Security personel using closed handed assaults, kicks, weapons, multiple officers assaulting an inmate, putting I/M's head in toilets, choking, leaving I/M's in cells with Mace/OC spray on persons, dragging I/Ms down galleries with leg shackles and handcuffs on at very fast speeds causing the I/M to "look like he's resisting" and tearing wounds in hands and ankles with tightened mechanical restraints. Video and audio is suppose to be used by tactical team but the tactical team either purposefully blocks the view by placing the camera on another team member's back or not using a camera at all. Also, medical technicians refuse medical care. We should have either recorded medical care or have to sign a refusal. Officers and staff will argue and be biased and charge I/Ms with assaults.

Issue #3, Property

(A) IDOC personel do not document property and list what we have. Also, they throw away property without documenting it and giving us an opportunity to fight/defend

our property. We are supposed to have an opportunity to grieve/send home/place in property/or destroy property issues.

(B) We get charged very high prices for commissary items.

Issue #4, Adjustment Committee

(A) We get found guilty for offences strictly/solely off of being I.D. gallery chart, and reporting officers report. No evidence gets used, and they use disciplinary actions depriving us of freedoms and liberties given/guaranteed to us by law.

Issue #5, Equal Protection of Rights

(A) We are segregation inmates. We are being treated different than ex-Tamms inmates and other level 1 Maximum Facility seg inmates (such as Stateville and Menard). We don't get TVs, food, yard among our peers, new clean mattresses, 4 hr visits instead of 1 hour we get now. And a yard with recreation items such as weights.

Issue #6, Opportunity for redemption of lost good time, seg time and other disciplinary actions

(A) A long/short term seg program has been initiated here in Pontiac. But this program is not solid. Meaning if we accomplish what is required of us by their stipulations they still say "Further observation needed." If we earn something that is written in black and white we should not be deprived of it and it should be awarded in a[n] efficient time frame.

Issue #7, Cell Conditions

(A) Lights in cells are 8-9 feet above ground level and we must climb on our bed to turn a light on or off, therefore risking injury.

(B) Count lights are left on for long periods of time, 4-12 hours most days. Count lights cause headaches, nausea, irritation, mental strain, and are only to be used for security purposes.

(C) Dust/germs in air vents, doors, feeding slots, and areas outside cells we can't touch.

Issue #8, Officer Conduct

(A) Officers provoke inmates to do dangerous, [drastic] acts that put themselves, inmates, officers and other staff, and property and good time privileges, seg time, etc. in jeopardy.

(B) If an I/M asks for medical or mental health assistance we must actually hurt ourselves or wait for hardship to get relief. We get denied access.

(C) When using law library we can only take 20 sheets of paper and 1 ink pen. We can't cross reference our personal legal periodicals/documents.

(D) Officers deprive I/Ms of access to higher authority, and don't act civil/social with the I/Ms in a professional matter [sic].

(E) The officers don't always take precautions to ensure health environments such as wearing latex gloves. They wear cloth gloves that hold germs/disease while passing trays and I/Ms also, they handle dirty laundry and food at the same time.

. . . Note: We have been going on hunger strike to try to reach our goals. We are united for this cause because we are human[;] therefore we want the Rights/Freedoms/liberties entitled to us by law.

Another Letter, February 8, 2013

As of today, there are still approximately 50 inmates that have been on a hunger strike for five days or longer. . . . I may suffer some serious consequences as a result of . . . [a list of medical conditions]. . . .

For the last two or three days the Illinois Department of Corrections spokesperson--I believe her name is Stacy Solano--has been issuing statements to the media saying that the conditions at Pontiac are clean and sanitary, that most of our complaints are groundless and that they have given us all of the privileges we had earned in Tamms. This is not even close to true.

. . . I have not received a disciplinary report of any significance since the year 2000. Due to my good behavior and positive adjustment I had earned every privilege that Tamms had to offer. I could use a razor once a week, I had my own fingernail clippers, I was allowed to walk to the shower and yard without being handcuffed or shackled, I was allowed to possess my T.V., radio, and cassette tapes, I was in a cell that did not have a plexiglass cellfront, and I was allowed to purchase limited food items, coffee and cocoa from the commissary.

Pontiac has revoked all of the abovementioned privileges other than my T.V. and radio--I believe they gave me those two items in an attempt to pacify and silence me.

Since the beginning of our hunger strike they have given us a pillow, which is mandated by 20 ILL ADMIN. CODE CH. I § 504.620 (b)(2) and a 1/2 of a sponge. I guess this is their idea of providing us cleaning supplies for our cells. Other than this, none of our complaints have been even minimally addressed.

. . . They are finally passing out blankets on 6-gallery, night now!

. . . They don't sell, or provide plain white legal envelopes, so I'm forced to use these old card envelopes.

Another Letter, February 10, 2013

One thing I would like to bring up to . . . you is also the lack of mental health treatment. Prior to coming to Pontiac while at Tamms I was seeing a mental health counselor twice a month and a psychiatrist once a month. In March of 2012 I was diagnosed with schizophrenia with paranoid ideations. I am 33 years old. I have been involved in the mental health system since I was three years old. I have always had mental health treatment in prison since 2000. Since coming to Pontiac the second day I was here a mental health lady came to my door for a few minutes, asked me some questions. Also I saw a psychiatrist once for five minutes. . . .

They have gave us small things like pillows, cotton blankets, gave some guys their electronics. They gave us sponges. There are still things to fight for. The plexiglass shield is a big deal. Last year I heard from one of the guys here at Pontiac that 2 guys

died on 1 gallery, the only gallery prior to us coming that had shields on their doors. They used to put Tamms guys that had to go to court here in Northern Illinois. They had me personally housed there. It was August . . . It was 110 degrees outside. It was about 1025-130 degrees in the cell.

I just wanted to let you know about the mental health thing. . . .