

**Du Quoin
Evening
Call**

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DOC: Ill. Gubernatorial candidates' prison violence claims unsupported

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS -- Illinois corrections spokesman Tom Shaer responded to claims by State representative and lieutenant governor candidate Jil Walker Tracy (R-Quincy) and Sen. Kirk Dillard that the prison system is overtaxed by the closure of the Tamms maximum security prison.

Shaer told the Du Quoin Evening Call Tuesday: "Claims of increased inmate violence, jeopardized safety of IDOC staff, or understaffing and a related security risk are not supported by data or facts because none exist. Such data and facts do not exist because those claims are pure fiction.

"Tamms was not a "safety valve" for Illinois prisons, and there has been no increase in violence in this system since Tamms closed. In fact, serious assault on staff in our prisons was down and overall serious assault dropped 35 percent in the most fiscal year. That downward trend continues. Meanwhile, savings from various closings is \$5.83 million every month, \$70M on an annualized basis.

"To say staff assaults are up 20 percent ignores key facts and is thus misleading. IDOC enforces a zero-tolerance policy. Even minor contact with a correctional officer such as spitting, flipping away an inmate name tag or throwing food which might touch an officer's foot is

classified as “staff assault.” Referring to these as assaults inflates the total number, which is unflattering, but inmates know that even slight behavior issues will hurt earned time.

“The suggestion that transferring inmates from Tamms has caused problems at Menard is simply untrue. Menard received only seven offenders from Tamms. Seven. The majority were sent to Pontiac Correctional Center, where the warden and staff report those transferred were involved in just three serious incidents in 2013, a year in which such incidents declined at Pontiac.

“Security posts at no Illinois correctional center are ever understaffed. Mandatory [security] posts are agreed to, in writing, by both the Department and the employees union, AFSCME.

“Savings from closing Tamms and other Illinois Department of Corrections facilities are happening at the rate of \$5.83 million every month, \$70 million on an annualized basis. A one-time loss of \$30 million in savings was due to the lawsuit filed by AFSCME, which delayed the closures and employee transfers for seven months.

“Overtime costs, since employee transfers were completed, have sharply declined. IDOC projects to save \$17 million to \$20 million in overtime during this fiscal year, which would leave us at or below the FY12 total. Yes, overtime has grown during the past six years, but that is due to an increase of 3,300 in our inmate population.

“IDOC accurately determines operational capacity in its facilities. The one-inmate-per-cell practice is not used today anywhere in the United States. With standard double-celling, our operational capacity is around 49,000. We are not overcrowded. Extra room? No. But we have enough space to house all inmates safely, with everything expected in a humane system.”