

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS CONFERENCE: DATE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1993
 TIME: NOON
 PLACE: OUTSIDE THE STATE OF ILLINOIS BUILDING

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MAXED OUT: CONCERNED ORGANIZATIONS DEMAND THAT 60 MILLION DOLLARS EARMARKED FOR CONSTRUCTION OF SUPERMAX PRISON IN ILLINOIS BE DIVERTED IMMEDIATELY TO RESOLVE THE FISCAL CRISIS IN THE SCHOOLS.

A press conference will be held Wednesday, September 29th, at noon outside the State of Illinois Building to demand that the \$60 million dollars recently allocated to construct a supermaximum security prison immediately be diverted to resolve the fiscal crisis in the schools. Speaking at the press conference in support of the proposal will be State Representatives Coy Pugh and Ellis Levin; Director of the John Howard Association and former key member of Governor Edgar's Task Force on Crime and Corrections, Michael Mahoney; former Task Force Members Professor Bernard Headley and John Theis; and Erica Thompson, civil rights lawyer and member of the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, a prison watchdog group.

In the last legislative session, Illinois made the perilous decision to allocate \$60 million dollars to build a supermax prison. Realistic estimates and recent Department of Corrections admissions suggest that the real cost of this prison will be in excess of \$100 million dollars. Moreover, it will cost \$40,000 dollars a year to house a prisoner in the supermax prison, while Illinois spends a pitiful \$3,600 to educate a child in Chicago.

During the past 15 years, Illinois has built 15 prisons, and nothing has improved - - crime is not down, and no one feels safer. Experts across the country are noting that we cannot build our way out of the crime problem. It must, instead, be solved with preventive programs that foster human growth and with programs that

provide jobs, education, and housing.

Experts unanimously agree that providing a good education will help keep children out of prison. Therefore, the current school crisis is a means to ensure the criminalization and imprisonment of our children and justify the prison building frenzy in this state. 80% of our school system consists of African-American and Hispanic children, and 80% of the prison system consists of African-American and Hispanic ^{people} children. The insanity and irony of this "cut-education-fund-prisons" policy is all too clear in Governor Edgar's decision to convert a high school in virtually all Black East St. Louis into a prison.

Finally, Governor Edgar's decision to build a supermax prison in this state is particularly shameful. Supermax prisons have three defining characteristics - permanent lockdown conditions; implementation of isolation and behavior modification techniques; and the use of an *administrative* designation, rather than a legally challengeable *punitive* designation in order to transfer prisoners to the facility. It is precisely these immutable characteristics of all supermax prisons that caused Amnesty International, the Nobel peace prize-winning human rights organization to condemn the mother of all supermaxes, the federal prison in Marion, Illinois, and the recently constructed supermax in Westville, Indiana.

Moreover, in its annual survey of the U.S. prison system, Human Rights Watch, another esteemed human rights monitor, found that the proliferation of supermax prisons based on the Marion model was the single most disturbing aspect of the U.S. prison system. HRW went on to note that such institutions, by their very nature, violate the rights of prisoners and inherently breed additional abusive practices as well.

Thus, not only is Illinois refusing to educate a largely African-American and Hispanic school population, but Governor Edgar has made the decision to construct an institution which will cage a disproportionate number of Black men and is sure to result in international condemnation, massive litigation, and community outrage. State representatives, community activists, and even

members of the Governor's own Task Force on Crime and Corrections abhor these racist and inhumane policies and will gather together on Wednesday at noon to demand that the supermax not be built and that the funds be diverted the school crisis.