

ACLU Ohio

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/dear-cleveland-we-need-bail-reform-now>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Although coronavirus is ever present in our daily lives and occupies space constantly in our news and everyday activities, there are other plagues that haunt us. Black, Brown, and poor communities are not given the attention they deserve and the issues that plague them are often not addressed as critical, because of institutional racism and systemic inequality. Environmental racism, police brutality, food deserts, educational and employment disparities, pre-natal and other health related inequities these are all part and parcel of the many hardships faced by marginalized communities in the United States.

And while these issues are sometimes addressed, there is another glaring issue devastating our communities: the cash bail system. We must not allow the criminal justice system to continue devastating families and individual lives with this injustice and flagrant punishment of poor communities. Put simply, this system allows for those with means to be released from jail even if they've been charged with violent crimes, while the indigent, many charged with non-violent traffic or probation offenses, sit in jail for several months even up to a year or more before even going to trial. They subsequently lose their jobs (despite many being the working poor), their residences (thus becoming homeless along with their children), and sometimes even custody of their children. This is an outrage that is amplified by the fact that the judges setting these bail amounts do not consider an impoverished person's ability to pay when setting bail, and there is nothing legally that compels them to do so.

Marva and I have been working with the Northeast Ohio Action Team in association with the ACLU of Ohio for over a year now, and the work is both essential and difficult as many judges are resistant to bail reform because they say they don't want dangerous and violent offenders on the street. However, the facts indicate that well over half the detainees in the Cuyahoga County Justice Center are there for nonviolent offenses, which denotes they are being held in a potentially life threatening (and currently often COVID-19 infected) environment unjustifiably. Despite the rhetoric to the contrary of the fearmongering around violent and dangerous offenders on the loose, we are in fact our brothers' keeper. It is our wish and fervent prayer that you feel as we do this urgent need to assist the many individuals and families caught in this vicious cycle of the justice system's punishment for poverty money bail madness. If you can spare a little of your time and effort by assisting us in attending conversations about the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas or Municipal judges by phone or by email, it could help us change lives. We must stop this injustice where poor people are treated as criminals before even being on trial.

[Join the ACLU of Ohio Action Team](#), to help those in dire need of our assistance.

David and Marva Patterson
Northeast Ohio Action Team Members

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