

Ohio Justice and Policy Center

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

https://ohiojpc.org/?page_id=6545

Policy Issue Resources

Beyond Guilt aims to do for over-punished prisoners who admit guilt what innocence projects have for wrongfully convicted persons who claim actual innocence. Beyond Guilt is one answer to criminal legal system reform efforts that focus narrowly on a more palatable side of the reform movement freeing innocent prisoners and people convicted of low-level, non-violent offenses at the expense of individuals convicted of more serious offenses, including violent crimes.

OJPC launched Beyond Guilt in March 2019. Right now, Beyond Guilt is a statewide advocacy project and we will work to ensure that this work extends far beyond the Buckeye State.

READ MORE: [Beyond Guilt featured in The New York Times](#)

The mission of Beyond Guilt is to transform our punitive legal system to one focused on justice, redemption, and humanity for those over-punished.

First, **Beyond Guilt will identify unfairly sentenced Ohio prisoners** who illustrate widespread problems in our criminal legal system (e.g. imposition of life sentences for felony-murder; life without parole sentences for youthful offenders; broken parole systems that refuse to provide a second chance) and then fight for their release. **The project will represent individuals** who have served significant portions of their sentences and can demonstrate rehabilitation within the prison walls and who have the skills and support systems on the outside to continue the process of rehabilitation once they are released. Whenever possible, **Beyond Guilt will partner with prosecutors, law enforcement officers and crime survivors** who can help convince courts to release prisoners through various avenues.

Second, **Beyond Guilt will lift up the stories of the people it represents** to humanize these individuals and other prisoners like them whom society writes off for committing violent crimes. The project will tell their stories through a variety of means, including traditional media, social media, film and a blog hosted on a dedicated Beyond Guilt website. **The project will also facilitate in-person meetings between its incarcerated clients and legislators** who can benefit from seeing, face to face, the impact of overly punitive sentencing laws. The goal is to enable our clients to tell their own stories, to be living breathing testaments to the power of people to change, and to become disciples, who through their stories, can inspire others to care about those that they left behind in prison.

Third, Beyond Guilt will partner with its clients both those who are freed and those who remain incarcerated to **push for reform of Ohio sentencing laws** that overly punish people who have committed serious crimes and parole systems that keep offenders locked up for longer than they need to be.

Fourth, **Beyond Guilt will seek to build a national network** of similar projects that work to reform sentencing practices for people convicted of violent crimes and to promote evidence-based ways to reduce lengthy sentences without compromising public safety. Beyond Guilt will partner with law schools and public defender offices to build this network and with community and faith-based groups who work with returning citizens who need assistance once released.

Want Beyond Guilt to look at your loved ones case?

Register for one of OJPCs virtual legal clinics [here](#).

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Legal Disclaimer

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