

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/pay-stay-jail-fees-just-dont-add>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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CINCINNATI Today, the ACLU of Ohio released *Adding It Up*, a report that analyzes pay-to-stay programs at three Ohio jails (Fairfield County Jail, Hamilton County Jail and Southeastern Ohio Regional Jail), and concludes that charging inmates for their incarceration is not the revenue generator it appears to be.

Counties that implement aggressive jail fee programs simply cannot hope to recoup most of what they charge, said ACLU Director of Communications and Public Policy Mike Brickner. While many local governments are struggling to fund overpopulated jails, we cannot hope to balance our budget woes on the backs of people living in poverty. The vast majority of those entering our jails have low income, and nearly all leave with severe financial hurdles.

The ACLU report cites an example in Fairfield County, where pay-to-stay policies were abandoned in 2012 after collecting only 15% of what was charged, prompting the county jail administrator to compare the program to spitting into the wind. County officials even contracted with a collection agency to pursue outstanding fees, hoping it would improve revenue; but the effort did not lead to more people paying their fees.

Collections agencies often pose an additional financial drain on counties, with minimal results. Additionally, they often ruin the credit rating of people who have left jail but cannot afford to pay these fees, said Brickner. The only thing pay-to-stay programs like Fairfield Countys accomplish is to make reentry even more difficult for individuals, many of whom are already struggling with poverty and unemployment.

Ultimately, the only long-term remedy for our bloated jail budgets is to reduce the number of incarcerated people, added Brickner. By investing in programs the support rehabilitation, revising criminal sentencing laws, and reforming our bail system to allow low-income people out of jail who do not pose a danger to society, leaders can lessen the taxpayers burden and maintain public safety.

Pay-to-stay policies only make it more likely that individuals will return to jail and struggle with poverty. These policies are not the solution; they are part of the problem, concluded Brickner. The small amount of revenue generated by these programs is nothing compared to the long term side-effects. The harder we make it for the formerly incarcerated to rehabilitate their lives, the less likely we are to shed the burden of the worlds highest prison population.

In conjunction with the release of *Adding It Up*, the ACLU is sending a letter and copy of the report to every sheriff and county commissioner in the state urging them to abandon pay-to-stay programs.

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