

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/ohios-pay-stay-jail-fees-leave-people-heavy-debts-after-time-served>

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COLUMBUS A new report by the ACLU of Ohio exposes how pay-to-stay jail fees trap low-income people in cycles of debt and incarceration. The report includes the first-ever analysis of all pay-to-stay jail fees in full-service jails across the state, and profiles the individuals whose lives have been ruined by large debts from their incarceration.

Pay-to-stay jail fees are the next generation of unending debts that seek to tether low-income people to the criminal justice system, said senior policy director Mike Brickner. By loading formerly incarcerated people with increasing amounts of debt, these fees make it nearly impossible for them to successfully re-enter society. This starts the cycle of poverty and criminalization all over again, trapping people in the criminal justice system.

Read the full report:

[In Jail & In Debt: Ohios Pay-to-Stay Fees](#)

Of 75 full-service jails, 40 charge a pay-to-stay fee for incarceration, either through a booking fee, a daily fee or both. The worst offender, Corrections Center of Northwest Ohio in Williams County charges both, which can total \$11,996.20 for a 180 day sentence.

The justification for charging these fees is that counties might recoup some of the cost of incarceration, but this rarely happens, as the majority of those in jail are already indigent.

While Ohio law states that individuals are not supposed to pay more in jail fees than they are able, we found that few facilities actively take indigence into consideration, Brickner said. Many of these same low-income people are then turned over to collections agencies who hound them to pay and ruin their credit, sinking them even deeper into debt without much hope of escape.

The report calls for counties to stop charging pay-to-stay fees entirely, as they are ineffective and counterproductive. Short of ending the policies, the ACLU recommended that facilities should assess for indigence, and allow programming and community service in lieu of fees. Counties can also work to decrease local jail populations through pretrial release and use of ticketing instead of arrest.

Many in Ohio are turning away from outdated and dangerous tough on crime policies that punish people to the detriment of our communities. Leaders are increasingly seeking new ways to reduce mass incarceration and support policies that will promote redemption and rehabilitation. Ending pay-to-stay jail fees will go a long way in doing that, Brickner said.

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