

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/price-justice-prison-system-bursting-its-seams>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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On Saturday, November 2, 2013 a coalition of faith groups, unions, professional associations, community groups, and rights organizations (including the ACLU of Ohio) will hold a rally at the Ohio Statehouse. At this rally, we will call on Ohio lawmakers to halt the death penalty, end the war on drugs and the epidemic of mass incarceration, break the many reentry barriers for the formerly incarcerated, and put a stop to "stand your ground" proposals in Ohio.

*In advance of the rally, the ACLU of Ohio will be blogging about each of these four important issues. In this post, staff member **Kimberly Millhoan** takes a look at the issue of mass incarceration and its primary cause, the war on drugs.*

There are over 50,000 men and women incarcerated in Ohio's prisons; approximately twenty thousand were newly committed to prison between July 2012 and June 2013. Nearly half of those prison admissions were offenders of fourth and fifth-degree felonies the lowest felony levels according to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections [2013 Annual Report](#). Something seems to be amiss with the way our criminal justice system is handling low-level offenders.

For decades, staggering amounts of people have entered the prison system as part of the War on Drugs. Our prison population has nearly quintupled since President Nixon declared this national war in 1971. Americans have invested millions of dollars into this crusade so that we can punish drug users who would be better served by rehabilitation. People convicted on drug charges are sent to prison in droves, adding more and more to a prison system that has reached capacity and continues to overflow.

What good does this do for the community and for the convicted? These men and women have not only been forced into overcrowded and sometimes unsafe conditions, but they now must live with the stigma of a felony conviction, which makes it harder for them to re-enter society after serving their time.

By following these policies, our justice system sacrifices the safety of the general public, corrections officers, and law enforcement. Right now state prisons are at over [130% capacity](#). In some prisons, one guard is responsible for the supervision of over 100 inmates. When there are too few guards to oversee prisoners, it makes it more difficult to supervise them. Inmates often become agitated because they are unable to participate in activities because there are too few supervisors, which can lead to violent behavior and dangerous situations.

In a [recent report](#), the ACLU analyzed the reality in Ohio. In Cuyahoga County alone, officials perpetually overcharge low-level nonviolent drug offenders, overspend on unnecessary felonies, and overlook alternatives to felony convictions.

Does it make sense to perpetuate the problem of overincarceration by sentencing low-level felony offenders to prison? Aren't there other alternatives?

The ACLU of Ohio says yes, there are. The best way to ensure low-level nonviolent offenders do not reoffend is to charge them fairly and give them a better opportunity to seek quality employment. Numerous treatment and rehabilitation options would help people avoid the stigma of a felony conviction. Some alternatives include community-based correctional facilities, halfway houses, treatment, job training, and electronic monitoring systems.

Officials and the public are more than aware of the problem of mass incarceration in Ohio and the United States. We are long overdue for [reform](#). It is up to us to continue to educate others about the effect mass incarceration has on our communities and the burden it places on a system that is already bursting at the seams.

Join us on November 2, 2013 as we [stand on the side of justice](#) at the Ohio Statehouse and call on lawmakers to do just that re-evaluate our current policies and make some much-needed changes. It is time to end the War on Drugs and mass incarceration.

Stay informed

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