

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/death-rate-ohio-prisons-10x-higher-rate-states-total-population>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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CLEVELAND Today the ACLU of Ohio and Policy Matters Ohio released disturbing new data showing that the COVID-19 death rate in Ohio prisons is nearly 10 times higher than in Ohios general population.

The groups obtained the data from daily reports from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. ODRC published the first such report on March 26, following pressure from the ACLU of Ohio, Policy Matters and other groups calling for ODRC Director Chambers Smith to enhance transparency by publicly releasing data about testing, positive cases, facilities under quarantine, housing type, isolation frequency, and staff and inmate deaths.

Governor DeWine and Dr. Acton frequently remind us that Ohio is flattening the curve; however, one thing that isnt flattening is the death rate in Ohio prisons. Since the first death was reported in Ohio prisons, there hasnt been a 48 hour period without an increase, and last week we saw the total jump by five within one day. As of today, 64 people have paid the ultimate price. We release these findings to remind DeWine that these deaths were preventable, and that more lives can be saved if broader categories of people are released to a safer environment, added **Jocelyn Rosnick, Policy Director for the ACLU of Ohio.**

Compared to the rest of the nation, Ohio as a whole is doing well. Nearly 89,000 Americans, including just over 1,700 Ohioans, died from COVID-19 as of Sunday, May 17, [according to the Center for Disease Control](#). Ohioans, who make up about 3.6% of the U.S. population, account for just about 1.9% of the nations total COVID-19 deaths.

Looking just at deaths in the nations prisons, however, paints a very different picture of Ohios response to the pandemic. As of May 13, 373 people who were incarcerated in the nations state and federal prisons had died of COVID-19, including 51 Ohioans, according [to the Marshall Project](#). Incarcerated Ohioans make up nearly 13.7% percent of the nations total prison deaths. May 13 is the Marshall Projects most recent data.

Ohio prisons currently hold 8,950 more people than they were built to and are already dangerously over-crowded. Public health experts advised that until a vaccine exists, the only known protection against COVID-19 is physical distancing coupled with strict hygiene. Over-crowding makes these guidelines impossible to follow in congregate facilities like prisons.

The success of Governor DeWines aggressive repose to COVID-19 is apparent in the data, and so is the failure of his response to the crisis in our prisons, said **Piet van Lier, researcher for Policy Matters**. Governor DeWine says we are all in this together, but that is clearly not true. Accounts from incarcerated people and prison staff in Ohios prisons also dispute the rosy scenario painted by the governor. Its not too late to save lives, but Governor DeWine and his team must act quickly to release thousands more people to create space to care for and protect incarcerated Ohioans. A prison sentence should not be a death sentence.

The ACLU of Ohio sent public records requests to the [DeWine administration](#) on April 29 and to the [ODRC](#) on May 4, to better understand how Ohio leaders are responding to COVID-19 in Ohio prisons they have yet to receive responses.

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