

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/jailhouse-woes-whats-real-solution-reduce-population>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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It doesnt take too much imagination to see the heads slowly wagging back and forth at the local coffee shop when they learn the news. I can even see the eye rolls, too.

No, not from surprise or disbelief, but from the senselessness of it all.

Whats Going On?

In case you hadnt heard, the Summit County Sheriffs Office freed 71 people from jail because of a \$3.6 million budget shortfall, according to [Cleveland.com](#). In an effort to mitigate this, Sheriff Steve Barry shut down one of the jails wings to reduce the facilitys capacity by 149 beds from 671 to 522.

On the same day these prisoners were dumped on the street with virtually no support or resources three of them were arrested again. Even more of the released detainees may end up back in jail. According to Barry, most of those who were released were non-violent, low-level offenders. Of the three men who were arrested, one used heroin and the other two were picked up primarily for petty theft of basic needs food and a coat.

Read our [Letter to the Editor](#) about the Summit County prisoner release.

The Big Picture

However, Summit Countys budget woes are only a small piece of a bigger problem. Thanks to the failed War on Drugs, the United States has the largest prison population in the world, with [Ohio having the sixth largest prison population](#) among the states. [Americas tough-on-crime policies](#), which prioritize imprisonment over treatment and rehabilitation, have resulted in overcrowded prisons and jails, severely straining community resources nationwide and costing taxpayers billions of dollars every year.

It only gets worse. Its an endless cycle of poverty and incarceration. When more people are in jail and leave with criminal records, they struggle to find employment and housing, leading many to become incarcerated again. As a consequence, fewer revenues go into the local economy, eroding the tax base further.

Stop the Mass Incarceration Tsunami

The answer is not opening up jail cells nor is it building bigger facilities, if money were available. These stop-gap measures [do not address systemic problems](#) and only contribute to the revolving door of mass incarceration.

Its time to aggressively work on the underlying problems first:

These types of evidence-based reforms when implemented in cities and counties across the country have reduced the need for jail beds while enhancing public safety. For instance New Orleans implementation of a single reform saved the city \$3 million in jail operating costs in just three months. In Ft. Lauderdale, reforms reduced its jail population by 25 percent.

For news and resources about mass incarceration and other criminal justice issues, visit [our website](#).

So, whats the real solution to decreasing Summit Countys jail population?

Simply releasing inmates without offering re-entry or treatment services will not solve the countys jailhouse woes. It also wont lessen Americas addiction to mass incarceration. Common-sense, evidence-based reforms will. (Heads wagging, YES!)

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