

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/new-aclu-report-shows-ohio-lawmakers-undermining-criminal-sentencing-reform-efforts>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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COLUMBUS According to a report by the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, an analysis of legislation introduced in the Ohio General Assembly during the first six months of its 2015-2016 session shows that Ohio's senators and representatives introduced 54 new bills, 11 percent of the total number introduced in both chambers, to send more people to prison and jail. This is despite current efforts by Ohio leaders to simplify the criminal code and to propose changes that will result in fewer people incarcerated in the state.

The report is available at www.acluohio.org/statehouse-to-prison-2015.

This is a wake-up call for legislators to be a part of the solution and not a part of Ohio's mass incarceration problem, said Gary Daniels, chief lobbyist for the ACLU of Ohio. Our state's prisons and jails are significantly overcrowded, incarcerating nearly 12,000 more people than capacity allows. Ohio families, communities, and taxpayers are bearing the brunt of our growing criminal justice system. This has been a problem for decades.

The report, Ohio's Statehouse-to-Prison Pipeline, also shows that one in eight bills introduced by the Ohio House and one in 11 bills introduced by the Ohio Senate either enhanced, created, or expanded criminal penalties. The measures were introduced and supported by members of both political parties.

The negative effects of mass incarceration are not limited to prisons and jail, but follow people with criminal convictions for the rest of their lives. With more offenses accompanied by steep felony charges, more people, especially people of color, must bear the stigma of being a felon. This makes it nearly impossible for these individuals to obtain housing, employment, and educational opportunities.

With Ohio having the sixth largest prisoner population in the United States, lawmakers need to stop the growth of mass incarceration and allow the Ohio Criminal Justice Recodification Committee to complete its work on criminal sentencing reforms, Daniels said. We are recommending that every legislator take a pledge not to introduce any bills that will place additional criminal penalties into state law; and that leadership in both the House and the Senate freeze any legislation that has already been introduced.

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