

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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COLUMBUS A new ACLU of Ohio report, issued today, finds that a substantial proportion of Ohio's nearly 300 mayors courts operate in ways that suggest they prioritize money over justice. The report, *Off The Record: Profiteering and Misconduct in Ohio's Mayors Courts*, illustrates that many of these courts subvert justice, generate revenue, lack accountability, and have an inherent conflict of interest. The ACLU recommends five specific reforms for the Ohio General Assembly to implement in order for mayors courts to be fair, transparent, and accountable.

Mayors courts are relics from the nineteenth century Louisiana is the only other state that has them in operation yet they are big business here in Ohio, said Sri Thakkilapati, senior policy researcher at the ACLU of Ohio. For example, the mayors court in North Olmsted collected over \$1.3 million in 2016 from unsuspecting Ohioans. The fundamental problem is that mayors courts consolidate **executive and judicial** power in the office of the mayor, allowing revenue-oriented police and court practices to flourish unchecked under the current system.

In 2016, 1 out of every 6 traffic tickets in Ohio were issued in municipalities with a mayors court. The policing for profit that we've observed in inner-ring mayors court municipalities most negatively affects low-income communities and communities of color, noted Thakkilapati.

Mayors Courts can use the threat and reality of arrest and jail time to compel the payment of fines a common practice is the issuance of arrest warrants for missed court appearances. As noted in the report, between May 1, 2017 and August 1, 2017, the Bratenahl Mayors Court issued more than 100 arrest warrants; the overwhelming majority of these warrants were for Black people who had missed their court date. The ACLU of Ohio included a Driving While Black graph in its report, to illustrate the racial disparities.

The problems with mayors courts are overwhelming. The lack of transparency and temptation to generate revenue through these courts make them counter to the interests of justice, added Jocelyn Rosnick, advocacy director for the ACLU of Ohio. We call on the Ohio General Assembly to enact our recommendations to prevent further erosion of public trust in the criminal justice system.

The ACLU of Ohio urges the Ohio General Assembly to: restore state funding to municipalities, eliminate mayors courts in Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, and Summit Counties, increase education and procedural requirements for mayors courts, expand oversight of mayors courts, and abolish drivers license suspensions for any reason not related to public safety.

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Read the full report, [Off The Record: Profiteering and Misconduct in Ohio's Mayor's Courts](#)

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