

ACLU Ohio

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/aclu-urges-washington-court-house-end-unjust-citing-individuals-who-have-overdosed>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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CLEVELANDThe American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio sent a letter today to the City of Washington Court House, urging it to end its unjust practice of charging individuals who overdose on heroin under Ohios Inducing Panic law. A conviction under the law may lead to a sentence of 180 days in jail and up to a \$1,000 fine.

This policy discourages people from calling for help when their loved one or neighbor is experiencing an overdose. Its dangerous, said Elizabeth Bonham, Staff Attorney at the ACLU of Ohio. We cannot punish our way out of this opioid crisis. Charging victims of overdose with a crime is a perfect example of how *not* to deal with our opioid problem in Ohio.

According to news reports, Washington Court House began charging individuals who overdosed with inducing panic beginning in February 2017. Public records obtained by the ACLU of Ohio show that at least 12 people have been charged so far.

Officials may have good intentions, but we know that piling on fines and jail time to treat drug use just doesnt work. Beyond that, using the inducing panic statute to charge these individuals is unlawful, added Bonham.

By further punishing individuals who have already suffered from an overdose, the City of Washington Court House is advocating criminalization over treatment. We are calling on the City to end this practice, concluded Bonham.

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[Read the letter to the city of Washington Court House](#)

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