

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/introducing-our-columbus-police-contract-negotiation-toolkit>

Policy Issue Resources

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The ACLU supports the rights of employees, both public and private, to organize unions and bargain collectively. Collective bargaining statutes provide critical and necessary protection for workers who exercise basic civil rights, in particular, the rights of speech, association, and petition. Efforts to strip workers of these protections have no place in our democracy. The purpose of this toolkit is to shed light on the collective bargaining process with the goal of enhancing transparency so we can collectively work to address police violence.

Police practices gained national notoriety this summer in the wake of the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. But for those of us paying attention, we know that indefensible police violence against people of color is hardly new. And since this summer, Ohio has seen others tragically killed at the hands of the police allegedly charged to protect us. It is clear that police have always been, and will remain, state-sanctioned vehicles of violence empowered to take away the freedom and lives of people of color, until change is demanded and implemented. **In support of such change, the ACLU of Ohio has decided to create toolkits to help make police contracts more accessible, in the hope that those who took to the streets can continue to assert pressure during the typically obscure negotiation process.**

According to a 2018 [University of Oxford study](#), the protections provided for in police union contracts and the astounding levels of police violence in the United States are directly and positively correlated. Police union contracts often serve to protect police officers and help conceal abuses of power, and therefore work against the interests of our communities. While community members are directly impacted by decisions made during police union contract negotiations, the community itself rarely has any say or the ability to place pressure during these negotiations.

These negotiations are complicated, hyper technical, and usually carried out privately without any public input. The collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) that come out of these negotiations are written with legalese, clauses in preexisting CBAs may make it more difficult to alter subsequent CBAs, and it is not always clear what is covered by the CBAs versus what is required by law. Many police union CBAs are available pursuant to a public records request. (And in Columbus, the only CBA available online misleadingly only covers support staff, not police officers.) There are also many different players—the union, the police, the mayor and other politicians—and it isn't always clear who holds what power when it comes to these negotiations (especially because some politicians who do hold power sometimes suggest otherwise). All of these complications make it more difficult for activists to engage and fight for change. We decided to change that.

With pro bono support, we created a [police contract negotiation toolkit for Columbus](#). This toolkit includes:

Our hope is that by making the police contract negotiation process more accessible, people will more easily be able to continue to place pressure where it can make a difference. **Columbus does not have a shortage of activists, but there is a shortage of transparency when it comes to this process, and our goal is that these toolkits will remove some of the opaqueness.** We need the tide to change. Our community members' lives may depend on it. Let's be the change we want to see in the world, starting with Columbus.

On March 31, Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther announced the nine people who will be the first members of the [city's civilian review board](#), which will be charged with investigating alleged police misconduct.

Public sector collective bargaining agreements in Ohio are [available online](#).

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