

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/aclu-ohio-receives-award-combating-debtors-prison>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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With so many nonprofit organizations working on important issues across the state, what made the Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations (OANO) present the ACLU of Ohio with a 2014 Nonprofit Excellence Award?

For the past two years, the ACLU of Ohio has worked to end debtors prison across the state, and we've had some amazing achievements so far! Each year, [OANO](#) recognizes the creativity, execution, achievement, and overall excellence of a specific project or program with the Ohio Nonprofit Excellence Award. As a result of our success in this area, the ACLU was selected as a finalist, and subsequently won this award.

Debtors prison seems like a term that should have been forgotten long ago. Unfortunately, thousands of Ohioans faced jail time simply for being too poor to pay their fines. Not only was this practice damaging to the communities, wasting taxpayer dollars and often trapping its victims in a cycle of incarceration and poverty without end, but it flagrantly violated the law.

[Read more](#) about Jack Dawley's rise from debtors' prison and the Ohio Supreme Court's bench card.

In April 2013, the ACLU of Ohio issued [The Outskirts of Hope](#), a high-impact report documenting the scope of debtors prison, as well as, created [videos](#) to highlight the story of those affected by it. Additionally, we sent legal demand letters to courts where debtors prison occurred and issued an action alert that led to hundreds of residents asking the Ohio Supreme Court to take administrative action.

Our efforts paid off, and as a result of our work, thousands of Ohioans have been released from jail, over \$180,000 has been credited to individuals for the time they were unconstitutionally jailed for failure to pay fines, and the Ohio Supreme Court published a bench card outlining the proper court procedure regarding nonpayment of fines.

Although Ohio has made great strides, it hasn't been relegated to history just yet. The ACLU of Ohio is continuing to monitor courts across Ohio that still may be engaging in debtors prison. This includes mayors courts, which are a product of the state legislature, and often lack accountability and oversight, making them fertile ground for debtors prison to occur.

The end to debtors prison is long overdue, and we thank OANO for recognizing this important and ongoing work by granting us the 2014 Nonprofit Excellence Award! Our fight to end debtors prison in Ohio would not have been possible without the generous financial support of ACLU of Ohio friends, members, and donors. This support made the simple idea that no one should ever go to jail for being too poor to pay their fines a reality and enabled thousands of Ohioans to start new lives. Become a part of our ongoing campaign to end debtors prison and [support the ACLU of Ohio today](#).

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