

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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The ACLU of Ohio is a partner organization with the U.S. Justice Action Network

COLUMBUS, OHIO—Today, the most prominent voices from both the left and the right working on criminal justice issues announced the formation of **U.S. Justice Action Network**, a 501(c)(4) organization launching an unprecedented effort in Ohio to end overcriminalization, safely reduce the jail and prison population and related taxpayer costs, and break down barriers for those leaving prison to successfully re-enter society.

Our bloated prison population is ineffective and unsustainable and when prisoners re-enter society, they can't find jobs. This system places an astronomical burden on the taxpayers that can no longer be justified, said **Holly Harris, U.S. Justice Action Network Executive Director**. The work begins in the states, and U.S. Justice Action Network chose Ohio as one of our top priorities because its leadership is prepared to act and make the Buckeye State a national leader in justice reform.

U.S. Justice Action Network is the first action organization in the country to bring together progressive and conservative partners, collaborate with law enforcement, and employ state-specific lobbying, public advocacy, and public education efforts to pass sweeping criminal justice reforms. **U.S. Justice Action Networks** partner organizations include the **American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Tax Reform, the Center for American Progress, Faith & Freedom Coalition, FreedomWorks, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and Right on Crime**.

U.S. Justice Action Networks work in Ohio will begin with support for ban the box efforts. This policy approach focuses on removing the automatic disclosure and, often, automatic disqualification that results when job applications ask about criminal records. Instead, under this policy, job applicants have the chance to explain their record and any relevant context. This way, more people have a better chance of leading productive, law-abiding lives. Ohio's state administration put this policy into place earlier this year, and Ohio's legislature is currently considering a bill to expand this policy to local government.

More evidence of Ohio's commitment to reform was the legislature's creation of a Recodification Committee that is tasked with a comprehensive review of the state's criminal code. **U.S. Justice Action Network** will engage in this process to address overcriminalization, punishing conduct that is not morally blameworthy and the passage of redundant criminal statutes.

Following our groundbreaking success working with the Ohio General Assembly to pass first-in-the-nation criminal justice reforms, The Buckeye Institute continues to lead Ohio in implementing criminal justice policies that set the standard for other states, said **Robert Alt, President and CEO of The Buckeye Institute**. The time has come to fix our criminal justice system, which too often entraps unwary citizens, costs taxpayers too much, and fails to adequately rehabilitate and reduce criminal behavior. We are pleased that organizations from the left and the right have come together to address these problems with common-sense, nonpartisan solutions.

"With our prisons overcrowded and resources for rehabilitation strained, the ACLU of Ohio believes reforming our state's criminal justice system is a crisis that needs immediate attention from our elected leaders, said **Mike Brickner, senior policy director for ACLU of Ohio**. We are working with lawmakers from both parties to reduce our prison and jail population and looking at measures to keep our communities safe. We look forward to working with a broad coalition of stakeholders, including U.S. Justice Action Network, on these goals.

"Conservatives know government overreach when we see it, said **Joe Luppino-Esposito of Right on Crime**. U.S. Justice Action Network will help ensure that average Americans are not needlessly roped in to the criminal justice system. In so many instances, prison sentences disprove the maxim that the punishment should fit the crime. Evidence shows us that the length of sentence does little to deter crime. Evidence-based solutions to overcrowded prisons is long overdue."

"The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. For too long, our law makers have put big government in the courtroom by enacting lengthy prison sentences for nonviolent offenders and creating too many criminal laws, said **Jason Pye, FreedomWorks Director of Justice Reform**. Lawmakers have also allowed bureaucrats virtually unchecked power to promulgate countless regulations that carry criminal penalties. Because of the explosion in the prison population and funding needed to maintain the unsustainable and costly status quo, legislators from both parties are offering solutions to reform the justice system. FreedomWorks and our community of 6.9 million activists applaud these efforts and we look forward to working with U.S. Justice Action Network in Ohio to pass the best solutions in law.

In addition to Ohio, **U.S. Justice Action Network** will advocate for bicameral, bipartisan reform legislation at the federal level, and in Michigan and Pennsylvania.

For more information about U.S. Justice Action Network, please visit the website at www.justiceactionnetwork.org.

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