

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

**<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/stark-county-citizens-set-example-rest-ohio>**

## Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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I didnt realize, while I was on the bench that when I sentenced someone to 5-6 years I was sentencing them to life. Those are the words of former Stark County Common Pleas Judge Harry Klide, who sat with me recently to discuss criminal justice reform.

Those words were wonderful to hear as, for decades, there has been an incredible disconnect between those who are part of the system and those punished by the system.

While the mantra used to be do the crime, do the time, many of those who have fallen through the cracks, only to end up in prison, have discovered that mistakes mean the time is seemingly forever.

Ohios dangerously overcrowded system churns out thousands of people every year who return home only to find housing, employment and professional licensing even further out of grasp than before they ended up in prison. Unable to stabilize their lives, many of these people end up back in the system, assuming they ever actually left. And so the cycle goes.

Judge Klide is not the only person who realizes the errors of the past. He is but one member of the Criminal Justice Reform Committee formed under the umbrella of Coming Together Stark County. The committee is a cross-section of everyone in Stark County younger, older, black, white, former elected officials, academics, students, and people who know these problems firsthand.

Their victories include persuading local governments in Canton, Stark County, Massillon, and Alliance to ban the box, a somewhat misleading term that pushes criminal background checks toward the end of the interview process rather than the start. The idea is that employers get to know the person, their skills, and their work experience instead of immediately filing the application or resume in the garbage can because of a checked box revealing an unfortunate past.

The committee invited me to speak with them two weeks ago, where I shared news about [private prisons](#), [sentencing reform](#), and efforts yet to bear fruit. Very little of what I said was news to any of these citizens who have selflessly banded together to effect positive change in their community.

When I left, I could not help but think I learned more from them than they did from me.

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