

ACLU Ohio

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/franklin-county-should-reconsider-pay-stay-jail-policy-says-aclu>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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COLUMBUS - Today, the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio urged Franklin County Commissioners and Sheriff Zach Scott to scrap a proposal to charge inmates at the county jail with booking fees. Under the proposal, inmates will be charged a \$40 booking fee that will be taken out of their commissary funds.

Pay-to-stay fees promise great rewards for county officials, but rarely deliver, said ACLU of Ohio Legal Director James Hardiman. County leaders may think this policy will help their shrinking budgets, but pay-to-stay programs typically create new levels of bureaucracy and diminish any net revenues.

Clermont and Medina counties previously implemented pay-to-stay policies but ended them after they proved to be fiscally unsound and overly bureaucratic.

The problem facing Franklin County Jail is that far too many people are incarcerated and driving up costs, said Hardiman. State leaders have begun to develop reforms to stop overincarceration, and local officials must follow suit. Commissioners could realize more cost savings by investing in programs like job counseling, mental health treatment, and youth programs that help keep people out of jail in the first place.

Fines will be taken from inmates commissary accounts. Inmates may purchase a variety of items including pens, paper, envelopes, and stamps to keep in touch with relatives. Research by criminal justice experts has shown that contact with family members is critical for jail inmates to successfully reintegrate back into society.

Not only are these fines unfair and draconian, they could be counter-productive in ensuring the safety of our community. Incarcerated people who re-enter society are less likely to successfully reintegrate with fines hanging over their heads and little support from family members. We want to lessen the odds of people re-offending and burdening our communities, not create new barriers, concluded Hardiman.

In addition to its letter, the ACLU also enclosed a copy of its report, *In For a Penny: The Rise of Americas New Debtors Prisons*, which profiles the use of pay-to-stay programs in Ohio.

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