

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like counties across the country, Franklin County has adopted overly aggressive policing and prosecution strategies that are entangling far too many Black and Latino men and women in the criminal justice system, while doing little to make the community safer. The city and county are failing to follow best practices for reducing incarceration, improving police community relationships and preventing violence.

- **Between 1985 and 2014 the per capita jail population in Franklin County increased by 65 percent.**
- **The number of women incarcerated tripled.**
- **Blacks in Franklin County are 3.8 times more likely to be in jail than Whites.**
- **65 percent of inmates behind bars in Franklin County in 2014 had not been convicted of any crime — they were being held pre-trial.**
- **Many people are spending long periods of time in jail in Franklin County, before having their charges dismissed or being found innocent. Nearly 40 percent of people who had their charges dismissed or were found innocent spent more than a week in jail; 13 percent spent more than 30 days behind bars.**



Franklin County District Attorney Ron O'Brien, Sheriff Zach Scott, and the Columbus Police Chief Kimberley Jacobs are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of all people in the county. But they have pursued policies that cycle

large number of Black and Latino men and women through the criminal justice system and effectively criminalize whole communities.

Mass incarceration may be a national issue, but solving it requires sustained local action in Franklin County. The good news is that there are tested research-based policies that other counties in Ohio and across the nation have adopted that have succeeded in reducing the number of people of color in jail and under the supervision of the criminal justice system, while making communities safer and refocusing public resources on education, training, drug treatment and violence prevention.

- **There were 99 homicides in Columbus in 2015, up from five years. 90 percent were shootings, 60 percent of victims were Black, and killings were mostly among younger people in concentrated areas in the region. Yet neither the City of Columbus, nor Franklin County have adopted evidenced-based programs, such as Ceasefire, to reduce gun violence and homicides.**
- **Franklin County has not put in place strong policies for holding police accountable for excessive use of force and officer involved shootings.**
- **An extraordinarily high percent of people in jail in Franklin County are eventually released without charges being filed or having been found innocent, as evidence by the fact that the County has not implemented proven policies – such as eliminating cash bail and setting fees and fines based on ability to pay – designed to prevent people from spending time in jail simply because they are poor.**
- **There more that the District Attorney's Office should adopt to divert people with mental health and drug problems out of the jail system, in order to greatly reduce the large size of the current jail population.**
- **District Attorney O'Brien has not adopted responsible prosecutor practices, such as reporting on racial disparities in charging and providing pretrial services within 24 hours to people who've been arrested.**
- **Franklin County needs a comprehensive approach to reentry that includes investment transitional jobs and housing**

**This report is a call for leadership. Elected law enforcement officials, here in Franklin County, and across the United States, must choose whether to provide leadership to end mass incarceration and criminalization, or step aside, and let others lead.**

## **LOCAL TESTIMONY**

I, Anthony Gwinn, was incarcerated twice. I paid all court costs and fines, tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees, and all restitution, and successfully completed all probations as well as serving all my convicted time in prison. In other words, I paid my debt to society. But truth be told the way the current system is, you pay the price for the rest of your life. Mass incarceration affects the individual, his family, and the community he calls home. Kids are affected by the absence of the incarcerated individual. There is no way to pay child support or provide for your

family while incarcerated. In fact, the incarcerated individual has to depend on his family for all support while incarcerated. Once released from prison after paying your debt to society, being a felon prevents from fair housing and fair employment. Many doors and opportunities are also closed to you. I have experienced these shortcoming time and time again. Being a college graduate and having experience for qualifying jobs, I have seen through my own experiences how being ex-felon has resulted in me being denied opportunities time and time again.

People's Justice Project and the Ohio Organizing Collaborative have practiced what they preach in giving me a second chance, and giving me an opportunity to prove myself as an employee. They have shown me that opportunity should be based on fairness, experience, and character. The long lasting effects of mass incarceration, come from a system that needs to overhauled and reformed.

Incarceration is mainly based on money states receive from incarcerating mass numbers of inmates. The emphasis is not on rehabilitating, but rather, the emphasis is on keeping you in the system in hopes you reoffend, thus allowing the state to collect more money from you. In my opinion, the entire justice system needs to reform. Once you pay your debt to society, any ex-offender should get a fair opportunity for employment and housing. That is repeatedly not the case. Another example of keeping offenders, mainly minorities and the poor, in a place where their destinies are controlled not by themselves but by the system for the most part.



## LOCAL DATA

**Jail Population:** In 2014, Franklin County jails held an average daily population of 2,039 incarcerated individuals, making it the 45th largest single-county jail system in the country. The same year, 7.5 percent of all new inmates in the Ohio prison system were convicted in Franklin County.<sup>1</sup>

**Rise of Mass Incarceration in Franklin County:** Between 1985-2014 the per capita jail population in Franklin County increased by 65 percent, from 1.0 to 1.65 incarcerated individuals per 1,000 residents.

**Racial disparities:** Blacks are greatly overrepresented in the county jail. In 2012, the last year this data was reported reliably, Blacks made up 48 percent of the county's jail population but only 21 percent of the overall county population. Blacks are 3.8 times more likely than Whites to be in jail in Franklin County. Historically the proportion of Latino/a inmates has been relatively low – less than 1 percent during the 1980s and 1990s – but increased to more than 3 percent in the mid and late 2000s. The percentage of White inmates in Franklin County jails has fallen 24 percent, from 53 percent of all jailed inmates in 1985 to just over 40 percent in 2012. While there has been a 19 percent decline in the number of White residents in the county, the decline has been outpaced by the fall in the percentage of White inmates.

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Calendar Year 2014 Commitment Report

**Immigration:** Franklin County has consistently failed to report either the number of undocumented individuals incarcerated in county jails or the number of individuals detained for ICE.

**Women and Juveniles:** The number of women in Franklin County jails increased by nearly 200 percent between 1985 and 2012, and the percent of women in the total jail population increased to from 12 percent to 16 percent over that same time period.



**Unconvicted inmates:** The percent of unconvicted inmates in the Franklin County jail population increased 8 percent over this period, from 60 percent of the jail population in 1985 to 65 percent in 2012. Nearly 40 percent of inmates who were found innocent or had charges dismissed were incarcerated for more than one week, and 13 percent served more than 30 days. However, only once in the past five American Surveys of Jail has the county reported both the number of unconvicted inmates and the amount of time served by people who were found innocent or who had charges dismissed.