Impact Report

The Marshall Project tracks the impact of our journalism on policymakers, advocates and other media. This report highlights some key examples.

Fixing a “Completely Broken” System

Last year, we found that the corrections department in New York tried to fire hundreds of prison guards for abuse (or for covering it up), but only succeeded 10% of the time. Our detailed, data-driven investigation ran on the front page of The New York Times and in media outlets around the state, like the Albany Times Union. Thanks to our journalism, state legislators want to make it easier to discipline abusive guards.

A state senate bill filed in February would give the corrections commissioner — not private arbitrators — the final say when determining staff discipline for serious misconduct. As part of our reporting, we found that three out of every four guards had gotten their jobs back through the current arbitration process. The bill sponsor called our investigation a “stark picture of a staff disciplinary system that is essentially completely broken and ineffective.”

In other words, our work has had a real impact. The original investigation took more than two years of reporting and rigorous data analysis. We’re under no illusions that the introduction of a bill will end the problem we brought to light. But it’s a start.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

In October, we reported on how some states have made it much harder for readers behind bars to get their hands on books. Inside, books are more than just books: They are the key to education, professional development, connecting with the outside world, and so much more. Officials cited the fear that drugs are being smuggled inside books (though none could give us statistics on how often that happens). We kept asking questions. And even before we published our story, Texas rolled back its policy preventing books-to-prisoner programs from sending literature inside. Related: More than 30 outlets across the country have used our searchable database to publish over 40 stories about the books that are banned in their local prisons.

HOME AGAIN

Roosevelt Price, featured in our 2015 story about the secrecy and politics that drive parole board decisions. In November, Price finally returned home. He got an apartment through a reentry program and works at the Anheuser-Busch plant in St. Louis.

UP IN SMOKE

In February, we partnered with The Frontier and Kay NewsCow to show how local prosecutors in Oklahoma have been charging people for using medical marijuana while pregnant, even though they have a license to legally use the drug. Soon after we published our investigation, one local police department — in Ponca City, Oklahoma — said they are no longer forwarding cases involving medical marijuana for prosecution until the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals rules on the issue.

Amanda Aguilar, who had a doctor-approved license to use medical marijuana during her pregnancy. Patrick Quiring FOR THE FRONTIER
Impact from our Cleveland Newsroom

BACK BEHIND THE WHEEL

A Marshall Project - Cleveland and News 5 Cleveland investigation in August found that the state had issued a staggeringly high number of driver’s license suspensions — often for debt. In December, Ohio legislators and advocacy groups expanded a proposed law to help hundreds of thousands of additional drivers restore their licenses. The proposal, which has broad support among both parties, is working its way through the Ohio Senate. It will help eliminate fines and fees that have triggered license suspensions for offenses such as failing to show proof of insurance or missing child support payments.

Theresa Smith filed for bankruptcy to clear debt from a license suspension. She hopes a proposed Ohio law will end the spiraling effects of debt-related suspensions she’s witnessed. GUS CHAN FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

INSIDE AND OUT

New data from Bratenahl, a mostly White Cleveland suburb, show 69% of all tickets since February 2023 went to Black drivers. Village officials say they hope more police anti-bias training and record-keeping will solve the problem. A year ago, Bratenahl’s data was missing race in about half of all tickets issued in recent years. It is available now because of reporting by The Marshall Project - Cleveland and News 5 Cleveland in November 2022. We stitched together data from multiple sources to estimate that Black drivers represented at least 60% of those stopped, very close to what the actual numbers turned out to be in 2023. That investigation led to a policy change within Bratenahl to have their police officers record race data on every stop. Now, there is concrete data that confirms what some Black Clevelanders have nicknamed the “Bratenahl tax.”

Cuyahoga County officials have pledged to increase reentry services in the wake of our December report. ELI HILLER FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

REENTRY IN CLEVELAND

In late January, Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne said he wanted to ramp up reentry services for people as they are released from jails and prisons. Ronayne’s declaration came two months after The Marshall Project - Cleveland reported in December that the county offered no reentry services to people when they leave the county jail. “I want people to have resources at the ready when they leave so they’re not just dropped off somewhere,” Ronayne told a local weekly. Ronayne added that he wants reentry services to be incorporated into the county’s new plan to build a jail campus.

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“[Having access to The Marshall Project’s journalism] would have moved me so much faster and so much closer to me becoming the person I wanted to be. Prison separates you from society. So The Marshall Project ... it’s like breath to a man that has asthma.”

SOURCE: INTERVIEW WITH THE OHIO NEWSROOM

LOUIS FIELDS

“BRATENAHL TAX”

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