

Impact Report

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



Victoria Villanueva and her children play outside her home in West Lafayette, Indiana. Doctors gave her morphine to ease her pain during the birth of her first child in 2017. The hospital drug tested her daughter's first bowel movement and it was positive for opiates. ASH DYE FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

Revealing how false positive drug tests separate moms from babies

Our reporting on how hospitals often use drug tests — including false positives and positive tests for drugs prescribed by the same hospital — to separate mothers from their newborns has triggered civil rights complaints in multiple states, prompted congressmen and senators from both parties to ask questions, and ignited a firestorm of conversation among doctors and industry groups.

“Thirty years ago the same thing happened to me. This is the first time I’ve seen any coverage of this issue and it’s been good to know someone else is looking at what’s happening.”

READER EMAIL

In September, we [revealed how mothers could be separated from their newborns](#) for false positive drug tests that could be triggered by something as benign as a poppy-seed bagel. Done in partnership with Reveal, Mother Jones, and USA TODAY, it was one of our most widely read stories of the year. And in December, we [published a follow-up](#) about mothers with no history of drug use who could be separated from their babies for weeks or months after testing positive for medications prescribed by the same hospitals conducting the tests.

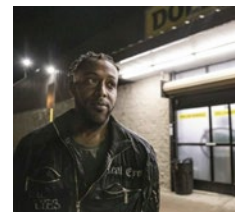
The response has been widespread. The national ACLU recently convened a working group of affiliates across the country to discuss the issue of hospital drug testing and reporting, and more than 20 affiliate states are now interested in pursuing litigation on behalf of patients who’ve been drug tested and reported. Sen. Tim Scott has added the issue to his legislative agendas for this year. We will continue to track the cascading impact from this story. Stay tuned.

DO NO HARM



VARTIKA SHARMA FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

A group of Washington state legislators [have proposed a law](#) that would exempt people receiving in-patient mental health treatment from an automatic felony assault charge, after our investigation found that the majority of these prosecutions are against people with serious mental illness. In June 2024, [we partnered with The Seattle Times](#) to look at how a Washington state law intended to protect health care workers — by elevating low-level violence to felonies — instead led to patients in mental health crises being punished for behavior that landed them in the hospital in the first place.



Surveillance video from a Dollar General in Memphis, Tenn., showed that three police officers beat and kicked Reginald Dean. His story featured heavily in our 2023 reporting. ARIEL COBBERT FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

The Department of Justice (DOJ) [released a report](#) detailing the problems with aggressive policing in Memphis following a civil rights investigation that started shortly after we reported on the subject in 2023. In the December report, the DOJ cited a police effort called “Operation Spring Cleaning,” which we examined exclusively with the Institute for Public Service Reporting after the death of motorist Tyre Nichols. The DOJ report also repeated the primary finding of our reporting: The problems with aggressive policing in Memphis went [far beyond the specialized SCORPION unit](#), whose officers have since been held responsible for Nichols’ death.



People gather at a rally for Robert Brooks on Jan. 2 in New York City. Brooks died after he was assaulted by New York corrections officers at Marcy Correctional Facility in December 2024. SHAWN INGLIMA/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, VIA ZUMA PRESS WIRE

ABUSE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Following his death in a New York prison, the family of Robert Brooks filed a lawsuit that repeatedly cited The Marshall Project's reporting on the culture of abuse within the New York state prison system. In December, [Brooks died](#) after a brutal assault by corrections officers inside the medical unit at Marcy Correctional Facility, near Syracuse. In January, Brooks' family sued the officers and some state officials, frequently citing [our reporting on the prevalence of abuse](#) in the prison system and how difficult it is to hold officers to account. Later in January, The Albany Times-Union editorial board [published an op-ed](#) citing our work and demanding a new prison system that has more accountability and is safer for incarcerated people and staff.

CLEVELAND SPOTLIGHT: Impact from our local newsroom in Ohio



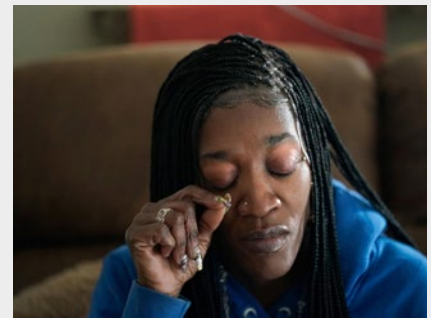
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY THE MARSHALL PROJECT; PHOTO BY MADDIE MCGARVEY FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Ohio [passed legislation to end debt-based suspensions](#) to help drivers get their licenses back after we reported on the staggering number of new suspensions issued in a single year. Near the end of December 2024, the Ohio legislature passed House Bill 29, and the state joined a number of its neighbors that have eliminated the practice in recent years. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Ohioans could soon be able to get back on the road legally. The legislation followed a [Marshall Project - Cleveland and News 5 Cleveland investigation](#) that found the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles issued nearly 200,000 new license suspensions in 2022 for debt-related reasons such as failing to pay court fines or missing child support payments.

SUPPORTING REENTRY

After we reported on Cuyahoga County's lack of reentry services, county jail officials [are finalizing a program](#) intended to help people meet basic needs upon being released from jail. As of November 2024, jail officials announced they were creating a reentry program intended to give people released from the county jail access to resources about housing, employment, health care and other essential services. The changes came one year after [The Marshall Project - Cleveland detailed](#) how few of these services were provided to newly released prisoners.



A'ishah Rogers' son was shot in the leg by a Cuyahoga County sheriff's deputy after a car chase in October 2024. GUS CHAN FOR THE MARSHALL PROJECT

VIDEO RELEASE

The Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department [finally released body camera footage](#) of a deputy's shooting of a teenager, after nearly four months of persistent questions from The Marshall Project - Cleveland and News 5 Cleveland. The sheriff's department refused our requests for the video for months, and just hours before we were going to publish our investigation into their refusal, they sent us the video. We worked to immediately rewrite our story, knowing that our persistence had applied enough pressure to force transparency and accountability.

“There’s a reason we partner with The Marshall Project - Cleveland. They do good work. We do good work. And when we work together, we get results.”

NEWS 5 CLEVELAND EMAIL NEWSLETTER