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Christopher Dietzen
Chair Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission

Chair Dietzen,

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage offers the following statement in opposition to the proposed increase to the Criminal History Score (CHS) for repeat Severe Violent Offenders (SVO). The proposed changes would disproportionately impact the African Heritage community and increase the already overrepresented population of our constituents.

African Americans are currently disproportionately represented in the prison population; accounting for only 6% of the statewide population, compared to 36% of the overall prison population. The Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commissions data clearly conveys the extreme disparate impact this proposed increase will have on the African Heritage community (see Appendix 8 Table 9 of StakeHolderMemo2018). While the impact for other races is minimal, the projected prison bed increase for the African Heritage community is a staggering 72%. Any proposed increase to CHS that ignores this disparity is irresponsible. Furthermore, the data needed to justify the changes is absent and the only discussion uses the term “blameworthy” in reference to those who commit repeat violent offences.

Blame cannot be the standard to justify changes to the guidelines. This argument is especially dangerous when the result targets and punishes members of the African Heritage community. Racial disparities do not occur by accident and will not be resolved by accident. The Council respectfully request that the Commission reject the proposal to increase CHS for SVO and explore opportunities to ensure public safety based on evidence, not blame.

Thank you,

Justin Terrell