



Task Force on Mandatory Minimum Sentences Meeting Minutes

Date: May 8, 2026, 9-12pm

Location: Afton Room, DOC, 1450 Energy Park Drive, St. Paul, MN 55108 and via Webex

Members attending in person (3): John Donovan, Kelly Mitchell, Nathaniel Reitzl.

Members attending online (8): Shane Baker, Jeremiah Carlson, Mark Haase, Dale Harris, Amber Johnson, Mark Osler, Robert Stewart, Ashley Sturtz-Griffith.

Members absent (2): Kenneth Sass, Nick Sasser.

Also present:

Minnesota Justice Research Center: Dr. Katie Remington and Janett Casillas

Wilder Research: Julie Atella, Jennifer McCleary, and Sophak Mom

1. Roll call (Don Klick)

Chair Reitz called the meeting to order at 9:00am. A quorum was established with the following members present: Shane Baker, Jeremiah Carlson, John Donovan, Mark Haase, Dale Harris, Amber Johnson, Kelly Mitchell, Mark Osler, Nate Reitz, Rob Stewart, and Ashley Sturtz-Griffith.

2. Approval of April 2026 minutes and today's agenda (All members)

- The Meeting Minutes from 4/2026 were approved as drafted, and the agenda was accepted without objections.

3. Preliminary Findings of Stakeholder Input (MNJRC)

Dr. Katie Remington of the Minnesota Justice Research Center (MNJRC) presented preliminary findings from the MNJRC's stakeholder input process on mandatory minimum sentences. Dr. Remington reviewed MNJRC's outreach methods, noting that the stakeholder engagement process occurred on a compressed timeline but resulted in strong participation. MNJRC gathered input from 95 participants, including: 77 criminal justice practitioners, 4 victims and 6 family members, and 13 justice-impacted individuals. Input was gathered through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

- **Characteristics of survey respondents characteristic:** Dr. Remington described the stakeholder respondent pool of survey respondents as including a broad mix of criminal justice system actors and related professionals, with representation from both the Twin Cities metro and Greater Minnesota.
- **Characteristics of interview and focus group participants:** Dr. Remington also summarized characteristics of qualitative participants. MNJRC gathered input from 18 victim, family, and justice-

impacted focus group/interview participants, with some participants overlapping more than one category. The participants included victim/survivors, family members, and people who had personally served mandatory minimum sentences, with underlying cases involving drug, firearm, failure-to-register, terroristic-threats, and mixed offenses. She noted that many participants had served substantial prison terms, including about 44% who had served 10 years or more, and described the group as primarily Black or African American and about one-third women.

- **Focus of analysis:** Dr. Remington explained that MNJRC's analysis is organized around three questions related to the purpose of mandatory minimums, their influence on decision-making, and their lived impacts. The presentation focused on how stakeholders understand the purpose of mandatory minimum sentences.
- **Preliminary themes:** Dr. Remington reported three primary themes:
 - 1) system actors generally demonstrated a more complex and technical understanding of mandatory minimum sentences, while directly impacted participants were often unaware of mandatory minimums before serving time.
 - 2) Participants also differed in how they described the purpose of mandatory minimums, with system actors emphasizing consistency, deterrence, punishment, and public safety, and impacted individuals and family members more often describing harm and broader social impacts.
 - 3) Across groups, there was general agreement that mandatory minimums do not appear to function effectively as a deterrent.
- **Regarding consistency:** Dr. Remington stated that system actors expressed mixed views on whether mandatory minimums produce consistent sentences, and that perspectives varied by role. Impacted participants are often questioned whether consistency under mandatory minimums supports fairness, particularly where individual circumstances cannot be considered.
- **Regarding deterrence:** Dr. Remington noted broad agreement that mandatory minimums do not deter crime. She stated that limited awareness of mandatory minimums and the role of individual circumstances may reduce their potential deterrent effect.
- **Regarding punishment:** Dr. Remington reported that participants generally agreed mandatory minimums function as a punishment mechanism, but differed on whether that punishment is effective, proportional, or advance public safety and accountability.
- **Discussion:** Following the presentation, members raised questions regarding variation in perspectives by case type, geography, and respondent role, and whether awareness and policy complexity affect outcomes. Members and MNJRC discussed whether simpler sentencing structures or public education for youth about legal consequences could improve understanding.
- **Next steps:** Dr. Remington concluded by inviting additional questions from members and noting that MNJRC will continue analyzing the data, including examining variation across respondent groups, and will return with further findings.

4. Subcommittee report outs (Committee Chairs)

Chair Nate Reitz called for subcommittee report outs.

- Kelly Mitchell, chair of the Stakeholder Engagement Committee, had no additional update following MNJRC's presentation.

- Mark Osler, chair of the Legal Analysis and Purpose Committee, reported that there have been no updates since the last meeting.
- Rob Stewart, chair of the Data Committee, reported that he was finalizing two graphs for later discussion and had been working with the Robina Institute to prepare data for the next meeting.

Chair Reitz added that he had requested longitudinal data from the predatory offender registration unit regarding compliance rates with registration requirements, noting that compliance rates appeared to have been a motivator for earlier policy decisions related to Katie’s Law. Chair Reitz stated that the data provided was preliminary and not yet cleared for use; it appeared to begin in 2004 and, therefore, may not allow comparison to pre-2004 compliance rates. He further observed, based on an initial review, that the data did not show a clear point of improvement in registration compliance rates and appeared relatively high throughout the period under review. Chair Reitz stated that once the data was approved for sharing, he would provide it to Rob Stewart for further review.

5. Discuss proposed recommendations (All)

Julie Atella of Wilder Research introduced the agenda item and explained that the purpose was to review and discuss the recommended ideas submitted by task force members in advance of the meeting. The discussion was organized around a guide shared in advance of the meeting. The guide included member proposals and rationales related to Minn. Stat. §§ 609.11, Chapter 152, and 243.166. The following is a high-level summary of key themes, disagreements, proposals, and next steps:

- **Firearm-related sentencing (Minn. Stat. § 609.11):** Members considered how sentencing policy should distinguish between firearm discharge, firearm use, and firearm possession. There was disagreement on whether mandatory minimums should be limited to the most serious conduct (e.g., discharge) or retained more broadly for firearm possession during criminal activity. Some members supported shifting away from mandatory minimums in favor of Sentencing Guidelines-based approaches that better account for offense severity and criminal history, while others emphasized the continued importance of mandatory penalties for public safety and punishment.
- **Role and function of mandatory minimums:** Members discussed differing perspectives on the purpose and effectiveness of mandatory minimums, including their roles in punishment, deterrence, and public safety. The group also examined how mandatory minimums interact with Guidelines presumptions, departures, and plea negotiations. There was disagreement about whether high departure rates indicate a problem with the policy or reflect intentional flexibility within the system.
- **Sentencing structure and policy design:** Members discussed proposals to better align penalties with offense severity, including changes to offense rankings under the Sentencing Guidelines and distinctions among weapon types and conduct. Concerns were raised about overly complex sentencing structures and their impact on transparency, public understanding, and consistency across jurisdictions.
- **Chapter 152 and “crime of violence” definition:** Discussion included whether certain controlled substance offenses should remain on the “crime of violence” list and whether firearm involvement should be a determining factor. Members also considered a proposal to create an automatic, time-based “off-ramp” from the lifetime firearm prohibition for individuals who remain crime-free for a specified period.
- **Predatory offender registration (Minn. Stat. § 243.166):** Members discussed whether mandatory minimum penalties for registration violations should be modified, including whether distinctions by risk

level or supervision context are appropriate and how housing instability and compliance barriers may affect outcomes.

- **Accomplice liability:** Concerns were raised about the application of firearm-related enhancements in cases involving accomplices, including whether liability should depend on a defendant’s knowledge of or intent regarding another person’s firearm use.
- **Next steps:** Members agreed that further refinement is needed. Chair Reitz indicated that the June meeting should include a clearer set of high-level options or decision points to support comparison of approaches before developing final recommendations or statutory language.

6. June agenda items (All)

a. Review timeline and work plan (Wilder)

- Julie Atella of Wilder Research reviewed the task force timeline and work plan, noting that the group is moving into a phase of consolidating MNJRC’s stakeholder input and data analysis from Rob Stewart and the Robina Institute, with June and July focused on integration, and the final report is due to the Legislature in mid-August.
- Chair Reitz also noted that the Legislature may find the task force’s recommendations more actionable if accompanied by draft bill language and suggested that proposed concepts be reviewed by Mark Osler’s Legal Analysis and Purpose Committee prior to finalization, with the Revisor’s Office preparing final language after the task force completes its recommendations.

7. Public comment

- One member of the public was present but did not offer a comment.

8. Next Meeting Dates

a. June 12, 2026, 9-12

b. July 10, 2026, 9-12

c. Aug 4, 2026, 1-4 (added)

- The task force also briefly discussed scheduling including availability for an additional meeting date on August 4, 2026, 1pm – 4pm.
- The meeting was adjourned at 11:49am.