

Data Analysis Menu — Task Force on Mandatory Minimums

Quick glossary:

Mandatory minimum (MM): A statute requires at least a minimum prison term (or prison commitment) upon conviction.

Departure: A judge sentences below what would otherwise be required by the guidelines or statute (here: below the mandatory minimum).

Executed vs stayed sentence: Executed means prison is served now; stayed means prison is not served unless supervision conditions are violated.

DOC = Minnesota Department of Corrections (custody + supervision data)

MSGC = Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission (sentencing outcomes data)

SCAO = State Court Administrator's Office (court case processing/charging/pleas/trials data)

MCRO = Minnesota Court Records Online (public docket/case records data)

Note: "Effort" is a rough planning estimate only. Items that require multiple data sources or case-file review generally take longer.

Menu of proposed data projects:

Topic	Question	What you'd get	Research Effort	Data needed
Baseline counts and trends (2015–2024)	How many MM cases are charged, dismissed, convicted, and sentenced each year, by district and prior record? How often are MM charges pled down?	Tables and charts by MM category, year, district, prior record; comparison to overall felony caseload.	Medium	Mostly MSGC; charging/plea details may require SCAO.
How MM sentences are resolved in practice	When an MM offense is charged/convicted, how often is it actually imposed (executed), versus a downward departure or another alternative?	Percent executed vs departure (by type) vs other outcomes; summary of departure reasons and whether prosecutor agreed (when available).	Low-Medium	MSGC; stays of adjudication may require SCAO.
Geographic differences in departures	Do some districts use departures more often—and do patterns align with differences in treatment resources or specialty courts?	District-by-district comparisons; descriptive links to treatment and specialty-court availability.	Medium-High	MSGC plus public data on treatment/specialty courts.
What predicts a departure (associations, not causation)	Which case or defendant features are most strongly associated with receiving a downward departure in MM cases?	Summary of the strongest predictors (e.g., criminal history, offense type, district).	High	MSGC.
Trial rates in MM cases	Are MM cases less likely to go to trial than similar non-MM cases?	Trial-rate comparisons (and plea patterns when feasible).	Medium	MSGC; acquittals likely require SCAO.

“Firm” mandatory minimums — do departures still happen?	In offenses where the MM is non-waivable, how often do courts still sentence below it (and why)?	Rates of departures below firm MMs; small sample of case-file review to describe how it happens.	High	MSGC plus case documents from MCRO/SCAO for case-file review.
Failure-to-register outcomes	In MM failure-to-register cases, are subsequent cases mostly technical violations, or new offenses? Did compliance change after registration law? Did reoffending rates change after MM law? What is the role of housing instability on case outcomes?	Descriptive breakdown of subsequent cases and comparison of case outcomes including housing instability; recidivism/compliance trend analysis.	Medium-High	MSGC; stronger trend analysis likely needs historical SCAO; housing-related reasons likely need case documents (MCRO/SCAO).
Co-defendants	How do charges and sentencing outcomes differ for co-defendants compared to the defendant who received an MM?	Descriptive comparisons of case trajectories for co-defendants (where linkages are available).	High	MSGC for a rough cut; comprehensive work likely needs SCAO.
Recidivism after a departure vs no departure	Are MM-eligible people who receive downward departures more likely to have a new felony conviction within 3–5 years than similar people who do not?	Comparable 3- and/or 5-year reconviction rates; optional refinements accounting for time in custody.	High	MSGC; DOC needed to account for time incarcerated.
Proportion of MM time actually served	What proportion of imposed MM sentences are actually served in custody?	Estimate median and mean time to release for cases in which the mandatory minimum was imposed (including CIP)	Medium	MSGC data and DOC custody data

