

Project Title:

Research Support for Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission: Comprehensive Review of Minnesota's Sentencing System

Objective:

To support the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission (MSGC) by providing augmented research capabilities from the University of Minnesota (UMN) research team. This collaboration aims to assist the commission with the review of the sentencing guidelines.

Project Leads:

- **Kevin Reitz**, James Annenberg La Veia Land Grant Chair in Criminal Procedure Law, University of Minnesota Law School
- **Christopher Uggen, PhD**, Regents Professor and Martindale Chair in Sociology, Law, and Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota

Key Staff:

- **Julia Laskorunsky, PhD**, Senior Research Scholar, will serve as Research Manager and Co-Investigator.
- **Christine Boisjoli, M.A.**, Communications and Project Manager, will ensure smooth dissemination of research and effective collaboration between UMN and MSGC.

Research Activities:

The UMN team will undertake specific qualitative and quantitative research tasks to assist MSGC in comprehending the current impacts and potential modifications to the guidelines and will perform comparative legal and policy research to furnish insights into addressing current guideline related issues. The collaboration will commence in January 2024, continuing through the end of 2025. The UMN team will provide research assistance, policy briefs, research-to-policy presentations, and comprehensive project reports, as needed.

Additional research support from the UMN team will:

1. Enhance the MSGC's research capabilities, allowing a deeper dive into questions that will shape the recommendations.
2. Enable advanced statistical analysis, vital for teasing out the effects of multiple factors that can influence sentencing decisions and outcomes.
3. Accelerate the review's pace, ensuring the MSGC finalizes its recommendations within the current membership's tenure.

Potential Research Topics:

While the specific research questions will be determined by the commission during the review process, we anticipate examining the causes of racial/ethnic disparities in sentencing outcomes, the role of the

criminal history score in sentencing outcomes – particularly changes in the score over time, and the causes of high departure rates for specific offenses.

Expected Outcomes:

1. **Informed Policy Decisions:** Empirical research and comprehensive data will guide changes to the guidelines.
2. **Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement:** A transparent research process will increase trust and engagement from stakeholders, confirming that recommendations are evidence-based.
3. **Strengthened University-Commission Partnership:** Establish an ongoing relationship between MSGC and UMN, fostering continued collaboration.
4. **Identify Future Data Needs:** Identification of areas requiring enhanced data collection and suggestions for changes to administrative record-keeping and reporting.
5. **Set National Precedence:** MSGC is poised to set a significant precedent for other states to undertake empirically based comprehensive reviews.

Commission's Expected Contributions:

In partnership, we seek the following:

1. **Letter of Support:** A formal letter acknowledging the partnership and its objectives.
2. **Data:** Access to necessary administrative data and support for answering data related questions.
3. **Research Guidance:** Assistance in identifying relevant research questions or topics.
4. **Feedback:** Constructive feedback on deliverables for refinement with commission's needs.