



Mar 17, 2025

Chair Latz, members of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee,

We are writing on SF1719, the creation of a Task Force on Mandatory Minimum Sentences. The Minnesota Justice Research Center is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to driving meaningful change to Minnesota's criminal legal system through rigorous and community-centered research, education, and policy development.

Mandatory minimum sentencing gained momentum beginning in the 1980s with the goal of addressing rising crime rates and drug dealing. Proponents argued these sentences would deter crime and guarantee that offenders faced appropriate punishment. Detractors contended that mandatory minimums undermined judicial discretion, increased racial disparities, and exacerbated mass incarceration.

The work of a task force, as outlined in the bill, is at its core about determining the impact of mandatory minimum sentences on Minnesotans. Rigorous research is powerful because it allows us to understand not only how well systems are operating but also how to keep Minnesotans safe.

SF 1719 is a necessary first step to gauge whether this tool of the criminal legal system is working as intended. A task force responsible for collecting and analyzing data to explore the benefits and unintended consequences of state statutes and practices related to the charging, convicting, and sentencing of persons of crimes with mandatory minimum sentences is critical to explore the overall impact of sentencing laws.

For the task force to be effective, we recommend these two changes:

1. In order to make meaning of data related to mandatory minimum sentences, improvement in data collection practices and accessibility is paramount. The bill language should add more detail around what data will be available to the task force to ensure it can account for issues such as recidivism.
2. Furthermore, this bill sets forth a five month timeline for a task force to meet, get access to data, analyze the data, and write a report. We recommend extending this timeline to one year.

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