



Criminal Justice Reform: Mandatory Minimums

Published on *Show-Me Institute* (<https://showmeinstitute.org>)



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[Legislation](#) has been introduced in Missouri that would relax the state's rigid sentencing laws in favor of more flexible guidelines. Known as the Justice Safety Valve Act, the bill would offer a reprieve from inflexible one-size-fits-all sentencing and could save taxpayers a lot of money.

Under current law, sentencing courts are required to issue minimum prison terms based on several criteria including severity of the crime, previous convictions, and whether the infraction involved violence and/or firearms. [The new legislation gives courts greater discretion. In cases not involving serious physical force or abuse of a child,](#) courts may:

depart from the applicable mandatory minimum sentence if the court finds substantial and compelling reasons on the record that, in giving due regard to the nature of the offense, the history and character of the defendant, and his or her chances of successful rehabilitation, imposition of the mandatory minimum sentence would result in substantial injustice to the defendant or the mandatory minimum sentence is not necessary for the protection of the public.

The opportunities presented by the Justice Safety Valve Act—cost savings for taxpayers, real rehabilitation for offenders, and reduction of recidivism—seem well worth the legislature's consideration.

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[2] <http://house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills171/hlrbillspdf/2152H.01l.pdf>

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