

Testimony at State Capital: MAPA Calls for End to Missouri Sentencing Advisory Commission Missourians Need Real Data for Real Solutions

February 23, 2011, Jefferson City, MO - Today, Platte County Prosecuting Attorney and Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (MAPA) Board Member Eric Zahnd testified in support of House Bill 257 to eliminate the Missouri Sentencing Advisory Commission (MoSAC). Representative Stanley Cox of District 118 and Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee is sponsoring the legislation. Dr. Jeffery Milyo, Middlebush Chair and Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Missouri, Economics Department also testified. Prosecutors call for comprehensive study that will provide reliable scientific data on what sentences reduce recidivism and improve the rehabilitative outcomes of offenders.

Prosecutors have been working on solutions that address serious concerns regarding recommended sentences, recidivism data, and prison cost calculations from the MoSAC. Prosecutors have criticized MoSAC's recommended sentences for years, arguing that one-size-fits-all recommendations are inappropriate and that MoSAC's recommendations for violent and sex offenses are unreasonably lenient. More recently, MoSAC has begun sharing recidivism data, but doing so in a way that prosecutors contend could be seriously misleading to judges and policymakers.

"MoSAC's statistics regarding recidivism are extremely misleading," said Jasper County Prosecuting Attorney and MAPA President Dean Dankelson, who spoke at a press conference later in the afternoon. "There is absolutely no scientific evidence to support MoSAC's claim that its recommended sentences reduce recidivism. In fact, a recent report demonstrated that MoSAC's recommendations may actually increase crime, rather than reduce crime. "

To avoid the "garbage in, garbage out" phenomenon, Missouri prosecutors urge policy makers to use only valid, unbiased data in determining which sentencing practices truly reduce costs while increasing public safety. Instead of MoSAC, prosecutors support a scientific evaluation of sentencing options. Fortunately, an effort led by Missouri Supreme Court Justice Ray Price is already underway to secure grant funding for such a study from the Pew Charitable Trust, working in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Vera Institute. MAPA leaders have already met with representatives from the Pew Trust and the Vera Institute to express our support for the study.

As Platte County Prosecutor Eric Zahnd testified today, victims are frustrated as well. For example, in Platte County, mother repeatedly videotapes herself and her boyfriend raping and sodomizing her daughter. The videos are made over a period of time. In some of the videos the victim-the defendant's own daughter-is pregnant and bound. The Missouri Sentencing Advisory Commission's recommendation: probation.

MAPA has aggressively supported programs and legislation that focus on both accountability and results, and for collaboration among agencies. For the past two years, prosecutors have worked collaboratively with groups such as the Missouri Bar Criminal Justice Task Force, public defenders, judges and others to

propose legislation and solutions that will help the state reduce costs without sacrificing the safety of its citizens.

The Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys was established in 1969 for the purpose of providing uniformity and efficiency in the discharge of duties and functions of Missouri prosecutors and their assistants. The Association today continues to further its purpose through extensive training programs and by working with the development of legislation that is important to Missouri prosecutors.

For more information about MAPA, contact the Missouri Office of Prosecution Services at 573-751-0619 or visit our website at www.mops.mo.gov ###