

Dear Legislatures,

My name is Valerie Estrada, and I am providing written testimony in favor of changes to the MN Sentencing Guidelines Membership requirements, specifically bill HF2956. I have served on the MN Sentencing Guidelines Commission (MNSGC) for approximately six and a half years as the Probation Officer representative and over the last few years as the Vice Chair. Over the years I have worked closely with other Commission members at larger MNSGC meetings as well as small workgroups.

The HF2956 bill proposes a change in appointment of Judicial membership, shifting from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the Chief Judge of the Appellate Court and the Judicial Council upon recommendation of the Minnesota District Judges Association. I fully support this change as it ensures that individuals that are appointed are appointed by a body that is more familiar and has a direct correlation to their work and the individuals they represent on the Commission.

I also support the additional membership to include an individual who works for an organization that provides rehabilitative services for individuals convicted of felony offenses. In my experience on the MNSGC, topics such as treatment, rehabilitation, patterns and success rates have been a large part of discussions regarding modifications to the guidelines. Examples of such discussions are the changes made to re-rankings of severity levels for child pornography offenses and most recently the custody status point. Though as a probation officer representative, I felt confident in speaking on some of these items, having a consistent subject matter expert as part of the commission is beneficial and a voice that is often missing. Similarly, having a person who is an academic with a background in criminal justice or corrections has proven to be beneficial. The MNSGC consistently invites academics to provide presentations about research and what other states and countries are doing. Their knowledge is incredibly helpful in understanding systematic impacts of past decisions and can keep the commission informed of the latest research around the country.

Lastly, I would encourage an amendment to broaden the Probation Officer/supervised release membership. Over the last six years, I have occupied the probation officer seat as a Probation Officer, Corrections Unit Supervisor and now Program Manager. I was able to remain on the commission due to precedence that allowed for other job classes to fill the seat. I would argue that as a Corrections unit Supervisor, I had an enhanced understanding of the practical and policy implications of the guidelines. I not only completed guidelines sentencing worksheets myself, but I also trained my Probation Officer agents on how to complete them. Moreover, my oversight of multiple probation officers gave me a broader view of how probation works in Minnesota, which helped to inform conversations such as which individuals would benefit most from probation, how probation holds people accountable for their offenses, and how particular guidelines changes might impact the field. As a supervisor, I was also in a better position to collaborate and seek feedback from the directors of the Minnesota Association of Community Correction Act Counties (MACCAC). Adjusting the language to allow for a Probation or Supervised Release "representative", as opposed to "officer" would widen the pool of applicants.

Respectfully,

*Valerie Estrada*

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