

Agency Purpose

The Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission maintains and modifies the Sentencing Guidelines that govern all felony sentences in the state, in order to support the development of policy and practice in keeping with Minnesota’s sentencing goals: public safety, proportionality, avoidance of unfair disparity, rational use of correctional resources, and transparency.

In doing its work, the Commission gathers input from a variety of sources:

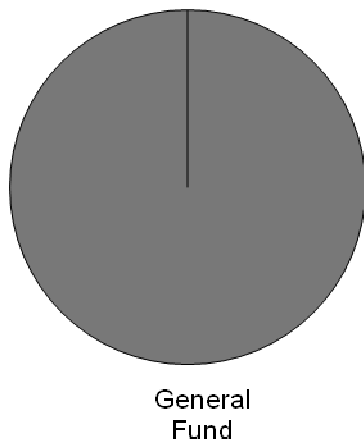
- the Minnesota Legislature and Governor, who make changes in penal statutes that must be incorporated into the Guidelines;
- trial judges, who implement the Guidelines when they impose felony sentences;
- appellate courts, whose decisions concerning sentencing may necessitate Guidelines changes;
- corrections officers and administrators who carry out sentences;
- prosecutors and defense attorneys, who seek just outcomes for their respective clients;
- law enforcement officers, who are most aware of trends in criminal conduct and enforcement strategies; and,
- citizens, including crime victims, who provide input from those who do not work within the criminal justice system.

The Commission strives to maintain a sentencing system that balances public safety concerns with consistent and proportional sentences.

At a Glance

- In 1978, Minnesota created the nation’s first sentencing guidelines commission.
- In 1981, Minnesota became the first state to implement a sentencing guidelines structure.
- The Sentencing Guidelines Commission is an 11-member body created by the Legislature to develop and maintain the guidelines, a set of rules that judges just apply in felony sentencing.
- The Commission employs a full-time staff of six to maintain the guidelines, train criminal justice professionals, collect and analyze data, and respond to questions regarding sentencing.
- In 1981, when the guidelines went into effect, 5,500 felons were sentenced. In 2008, 15,394 felons were sentenced.
- In addition to more felons being sentenced over the years, sentencing lengths have increased, and the guidelines have become far more complex, due to statutory enhancements and mandatory minimums.

Est. FY 2010-11 Expenditures by Fund



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement.

Strategies

The Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission utilizes the following strategies to accomplish its mission:

- Maintains a comprehensive and accurate database on felony sentences by ensuring timely and accurate input of sentencing data and implementing data cleaning and matching protocols.
- Ensures through training and other methods that guidelines are appropriately applied to sentences by criminal justice practitioners.
- Publishes both regular and special reports on sentencing practices and issues to enable policymakers, criminal justice officials and the public to assess felony sentences.
- Ensures that work activities are completed in accordance with the Commission’s goals and objectives and Commission’s fiscal and human resources are put to the most effective use.
- Modifies the Sentencing Guidelines in response to changes in case law and legislation and issues raised by interested parties.

Operations

The Commission employs 6.0 full-time employees to perform the strategies set out above. In fiscal 2008, the staff:

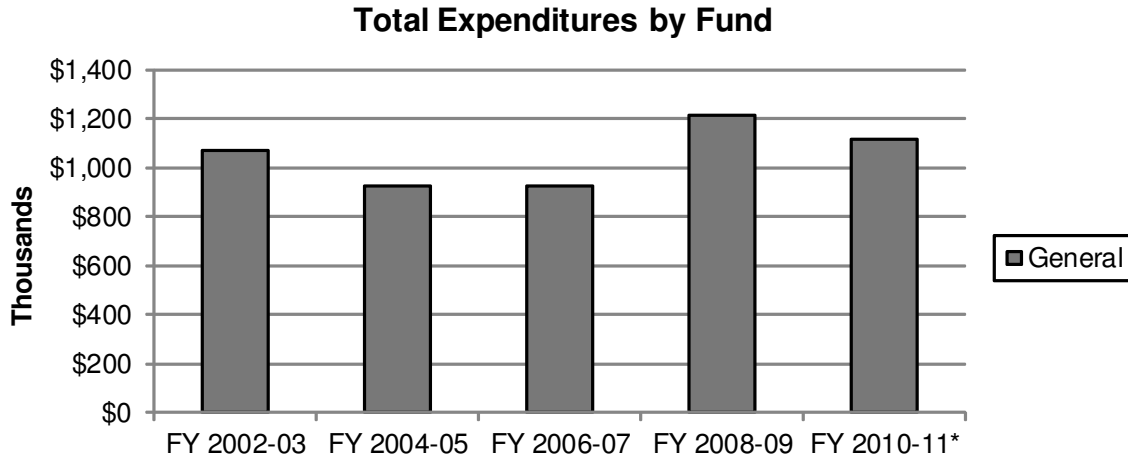
- ensured the accuracy of 15,394 sentencing records, collecting and processing data on felony sentences;
- responded to 64 data requests for a total of 180 hours.
- answered telephone questions on a daily basis from practitioners regarding application of the guidelines in specific cases;
- prepared 77 fiscal notes on proposed bills for the governor and legislature;
- held eight training sessions throughout the state for over 200 criminal justice practitioners;
- prepared and published the annual revision of the sentencing guidelines;
- prepared materials for public hearings, as well as timely notices of public meetings and hearings.
- prepared an annual report for the legislature, summarizing the year's activities and setting out proposed changes in the guidelines, as well as statistical reports on various sentencing issues.
- Worked with the Department of Corrections to generate prison bed projections and served on committees and task forces to further the goals of the system.
- Utilized technology to achieve staff efficiencies and reduced rent and other operating costs.

Key Activities Goals and Measures

1. Provide accurate, comprehensive and timely information and reports to the Legislature, criminal justice practitioners and other interested parties.
 - All fiscal notes on proposed crime legislation will be delivered within specified time limits.
 - Data requests will be completed within five days of the request.
 - Sentencing practice reports will be completed by November of each year.
 - Each year's guidelines will published electronically and on paper, so as to be available for use on August
2. Administer the Commission in a manner that support high quality work by employees and complies with state laws and rules.
 - Staff will stay apprised of topics related to sentencing and criminal justice.
 - Staff will annually review and update the approaches and methodologies used in each report.
 - Communication with staff about performance expectations and assessment will be maintained.
 - Staff will continually review and pursue efficiency and cost saving measures related to staffing and operations.
3. Ensure that customer service needs are met and quality public service is provided.
 - All training requests will be met if resources are available.
 - Training methods and materials will be annually reviewed for content and efficiency.
 - Staff will comply with all notice requirements for public hearings.
 - Staff will provide immediate assistance in answering guidelines questions 95% of the time.

Budget Trends

The Commission is funded through a \$1.179 million general fund appropriation for the biennium. There are 6.0 FTEs.



Source data for the previous chart is the Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) as of 08/26/2010.

External Factors

The Commission’s work is affected by the following external factors: number of felony sentences and departures received; number of sentencing worksheets to be reviewed; requests for fiscal notes on proposed legislation; guidelines modifications needed in response to changes in legislation and case law and requests made by interested parties; data requests made by the legislature, criminal justice practitioners, and the press; training requests from criminal justice practitioners; number of daily telephone calls from practitioners regarding application of the guidelines questions; and requests for staff to collaborate on various criminal justice projects, task forces and committees.

Contact

Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission
 321 Grove Street., Suite 103
 Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101
 (651) 296-0144

Further information, including meeting dates and times, information on public hearings, email address, and previously issued reports, may be found on the World-Wide Web at: <http://www.msgc.state.mn.us>.