



February 10, 2025

The Honorable Jonathan Patterson  
Speaker of the House  
Missouri House of Representatives  
201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 308  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Speaker Patterson,

I write to you today to express concerns about the policies of House Bill 862, HB 314, and HB 389, which focus on increasing minimum sentencing for convicted criminals. Missouri is ranked among the top 10 states in the nation for violent and property crime, and the demand for action from Missourians is palpable. However, simply increasing prison sentences does little to get dangerous criminals off the streets and make our communities safer.

Additionally, tripling the number of felons required to serve extended sentences would potentially cost taxpayers billions of dollars. According to the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC), the passage of HB 862 alone could lead to an additional 6,674 incarcerated individuals, further overcrowding our already stressed prison system. This would require either costly expansions to current facilities or the creation of new ones.

What is perhaps most troubling, though, is that these bills do little to address the alarming 62% of violent crimes that go unsolved in Missouri. Criminals are not deterred by potential sentence increases when there is a significant chance they will never be caught. We must instead focus on supporting law enforcement, increasing case clearance rates, and ensuring that violent offenders are swiftly brought to justice.

Missouri already has some of the strictest sentencing laws in the nation, requiring dangerous felons to serve 85% of their sentences, and anyone with three or more previous felonies serving 80% of their sentences. Both HB 314 and HB 389 would increase punishments for people who have committed their first or second felony. This is a misguided approach to lock up first-time, non-violent offenders with hardened criminals. And it could potentially derail the good work already happening at MODOC, which has reported a decrease in recidivism over the past three years.

I'm a mom, and I know that if I stick my toddler in time-out for five minutes instead of three minutes, it won't prevent him from drawing on the walls or other undesirable behavior. Instead, it's knowing that he will be caught that deters his future bad behavior. At risk of simplifying a complex issue- and tarnishing my 4-year-old's reputation- there are

multitudes of smarter approaches to address Missouri's public safety concerns than simply extending punishments.

Other states, such as Texas and North Carolina, have found success by adopting alternative response units that allow law enforcement to focus on violent crimes while mental health professionals handle non-violent situations. In Tennessee and Arkansas, state grants help law enforcement agencies improve staffing, acquire new equipment, and enhance investigative techniques. These are the types of solutions that have been proven to make communities safer and can be tailored to Missouri's needs.

The solution to Missouri's crime problem lies not in creating longer sentences but in increasing clearance rates and supporting law enforcement with the tools they need to protect the citizens they serve. With the right resources and targeted legislation that promises proven results, we can reverse the trend of declining clearance rates and create a safer future for Missouri communities.

I encourage you, Speaker Patterson, and the members of the General Assembly to approach this issue with a focus on proven conservative solutions that empower law enforcement and reduce crime while responsibly stewarding taxpayer dollars.

Sincerely,

Rachel Wright  
National Director of Right On Crime