



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 2256		DATE: 1/28/2026	
COMMITTEE: Judiciary			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. AC "HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: MARK BRUNS		PHONE NUMBER: 573-632-4209
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE		TITLE:
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CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 65101
EMAIL: mark@brunslobby.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 12:17 PM
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The Missouri Fraternal Order of Police supports HB2256.		



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: ASHLEY N WINSLOW		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2026 7:09 PM
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I oppose policies that increase length or likelihood of incarceration because prisons do not make us safer or heal our communities.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: BARBARA TERRELL		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
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CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2026 6:34 PM	

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I have been in and out of prison many times. Stayed for years and was let out at 6 months.. no matter how much or how little time I did, it didn't stop the addict from getting high when I got home. Not until 2018 when I left for the last time, why because I lost my family and realized I had to make a change so I moved 3 hours away started working and living life. Now I own 2 homes have helped open a sober living home for women and I have been sober for 9 years. Prison has become a multi billion dollar industry. It's a drain on society. Sending people there for longer terms is not going to help, help them help themselves, become productive members of society, sometimes they just need a change a loving hand and a support system to teach them how to become productive human beings.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: CLIFFTON DAVIS		PHONE NUMBER: 573-590-1107	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MO JUSTICE		TITLE: ORGANIZER	
ADDRESS: 4608 DERBY RIDGE DR			
CITY: COLUMBIA		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65202
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: GWEN SMITH		PHONE NUMBER: 314-324-9656	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: EMPOWER MISSOURI		TITLE: CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY MANAGER	
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CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63116
EMAIL: gwen@empowermissouri.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 9:27 PM	
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As the largest and oldest anti-poverty advocacy organization in our state, Empower Missouri is committed to improving the quality of life for all Missouri residents through advocacy. Since our inception, Empower Missouri has focused on the criminal justice system and its impacts. Our Community Justice Coalition consists of community advocates and organizations from across the state who work with those who have been impacted by the criminal justice system. Many coalition members are formerly incarcerated or have currently incarcerated loved ones, and all are connected by a vision for a future without mass incarceration.

We are providing testimony today regarding HB 2256, sponsored by Representative Hovis. This bill would repeal the current minimum prison term structure and impose longer sentences for a larger group of individuals. With the current state of prison understaffing, coupled with research that shows increasing mandatory minimum sentences can have an adverse effect on public safety, we believe this bill would move Missouri in the wrong direction while bearing enormous costs on state residents.

Current law stipulates that certain percentages of prison terms must be served by people with one or more previous prison commitments. Additionally, anyone convicted of a dangerous felony must serve 85% of their sentence. HB 2256 would amend the law, mandating that anyone with a previous felony conviction- rather than a previous prison commitment- be witholden to the minimum term structure. The bill stipulates that anyone with one or two previous felony convictions serve a minimum of 50% of their sentence, an increase from the current percentages set for one previous prison commitment (40%). It would also increase the percentage of time that must be served by those 70 and up (from 30% to 40%) prior to being eligible for release.

The changes proposed in HB 2256 carry an enormous fiscal note: costs by FY '27 are estimated in excess of \$875 million, including the cost to construct an additional prison. The fiscal note also states that based on estimated numbers of people sentenced by FY '34, five new prisons could ultimately be needed. Especially as the Governor calls for Missouri to eliminate personal income tax, which would have a profound impact on our state's budget, the cost of this proposal is simply not feasible.

This bill would come at an enormous cost to taxpayers, at a time when Missouri is attempting to cut taxes. The changes proposed in this bill would create a major strain on the DOC. Director Trevor

Foley stated in a 2025 Senate Appropriations Committee hearing that the DOC had 960 staff vacancies at that time. As a result, Missouri spent \$54 million in 2024 on overtime pay for correctional officers. In 2025, Missouri spent an average of \$107 per day per incarcerated individual, or \$39,040 annually per person. Outside of Medicaid, prison costs are the fastest-growing area of state budgets. Prisons cost most states almost five times more than they did in the mid-1980s due to having to house and feed people for much longer periods of time. Increasing minimum sentences will increase both the prison population and corrections costs without making our state safer.

People committing violent crime in Missouri are already serving a substantial portion of their sentence before returning to the community on parole or conditional release. In fact, in many cases, people are staying in Missouri prisons longer than they were in previous years. People designated a dangerous felony offender are already required to serve at least 85% of their prison term, and DOC data from FY '25 shows that the average person sentenced for a class A, B, or C violent felony served over 80% of their sentence before being released. The average time spent in prison for these offenses increased from 9.7 years in FY '16 to 11.4 years in FY '25. During the same period, the percentage of time served among Class D or E violent felony releases increased from 51 to 58%.

People convicted of non-violent crimes are not serving shorter sentences than in previous years. DOC data from FY '25 states that those serving time for A, B, and C nonviolent and drug felonies were serving an average of over 36% of their sentences in FY16, and that number rose to over 38% in FY '25. For D and E nonviolent and drug felonies, the percentage of sentences served has remained at 34% from FY '16 to FY '25.

Longer sentences don't deter criminals. Certainty of being caught does. Decades of research show that harsh sentences are not an effective crime deterrent, and a more effective deterrent is the certainty that you will be caught. However, in 2022, 64% of violent crimes reported to police in Missouri were not solved. There are clearly other avenues to pursue to address public safety concerns.

When it comes to moving away from mandatory minimums, there is a roadmap for Missouri to learn from: over 30 states have reformed or repealed their mandatory minimum sentences in the past two decades while maintaining public safety. And states that have dug in on "truth in sentencing" have seen terrible results:

Wisconsin had a 14% growth in the prison population and a severe programming shortage as a result
Georgia has seen dangerous environments within prisons, leading to more crime committed upon reentry, with significantly higher reincarceration rates

Arizona saw a 50% increase in rule infractions in prison, a 20% reduction in educational programming enrollment, and a higher rate of reincarceration

HB 2256 is a costly mistake that Missouri cannot afford to make, and I strongly urge the committee to vote against this legislation. I thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: KHANIKA HARPER		PHONE NUMBER: 314-530-8331	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: JUSTICE FOR ALL		TITLE: FOUNDER	
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CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63115
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: KORTNIE HUDDLESTON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 10:08 PM	

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HBs 2256 and 2637 would repeal the current minimum prison term structure and impose longer sentences for more individuals. Research shows that mandatory minimum prison terms do nothing to reduce crime. Increasing prison terms will have Missouri taxpayers paying more, without making our communities safer. It is important to note that anyone convicted of a dangerous felony already has to serve 85% of their sentence before becoming parole-eligible. These bills would impose substantially longer sentences on individuals convicted of nonviolent felonies, including passing a bad check, failure to pay child support, and many drug-related charges.

Decades of research have shown that longer sentences don't reduce crime—but they do cost Missouri taxpayers millions and worsen our already understaffed prison system. Over thirty states have repealed or reformed their mandatory minimum laws in the past two decades while keeping communities safe. Missouri should follow their lead—not waste resources on ineffective policies. That's why national conservative criminal justice organizations, including the American Conservative Union, Right on Crime, and Unify Us, oppose this bill.

The proposed changes would come at a high cost. Last year's HB 862, which was nearly identical to HB 2256, carried a lofty fiscal note: when fully implemented, costs to the state were estimated at \$280 million annually, requiring 130 additional full-time employees. HB 2637 will likely carry an even higher fiscal note, due to the more sweeping changes proposed in that bill. Missouri prisons continue to experience significant understaffing challenges, and the annual cost to incarcerate someone in Missouri has increased over \$10,000 over the last ten years to \$31,923. Especially at a time when the legislature is considering moving towards removing the individual income tax, we simply cannot afford these proposals. We should be supporting policies that would reduce our reliance on the corrections system, not compound it.

Increasing minimum sentences will increase both the prison population and corrections costs without making our state safer. Please oppose HB 2256 and HB 2637 to expand prison terms.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: MARIE NDIAYE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: FWD.US		TITLE: RESEARCH AND POLICY MANAGER, CRIMINAL JUSTICE	
ADDRESS:			
CITY: WASHINGTON		STATE: DC	ZIP: 20001
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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2637 & HB 2256
 House Judiciary Committee
 January 28, 2026

FWD.us respectfully submits this written testimony in opposition to House Bills 2637 and 2256, two bills that would significantly increase the mandatory minimum time served requirements for people serving Missouri prison sentences. FWD.us is a bipartisan political organization that believes that America’s families, communities, and economy thrive when more individuals are able to achieve their full potential. To that end, FWD.us has worked to advance common-sense criminal justice reforms that prioritize public safety, fairness, and fiscal responsibility in some of the nation’s highest incarcerating states including Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Arizona.

These bills are the opposite of common-sense reform. Increasing time-served requirements undermines data-driven solutions that help reduce misconduct and violence in prisons and will make Missouri prisons less safe for incarcerated people and staff. Despite claims that proposals like HB 2637 “clarify” for victims and defendants alike how much time will be served, it provides no more certainty than the current system, but comes at potentially enormous cost to the state’s taxpayers and economy. We urge the committee members to vote no on these bills.

Increased Incarceration is Ineffective and Costly for Crime Prevention

Research has long found that harsher sentences do nothing to deter future crime, and may in fact increase recidivism. In particular, adding extra months and years to the time spent in prison, as these bills would, does nothing to increase public safety and simply wastes taxpayer dollars.

HB 2637 would increase minimum time served requirements across all felony classes and repeal conditional release. For instance, this bill would increase the minimum time served for Class A and B drug offenses from 20% under current law to as high as 80%. Proponents argue that the way these ranges were set based on how long people currently spend past their eligibility date means they will not increase the prison population. That is not at all certain. Although on average people may already be released well past eligibility, any average will cloak that some people serve less time and some people serve more. For instance, last year people convicted of Class C, D, and E drug and other nonviolent crimes were released after serving 31% of their sentence on average (with an eligibility threshold of 15% under current law). Mathematically, this could mean everyone served 30%, or it could

mean half of the people in this group were released at their eligibility threshold at 15%, and half were kept until 45%. These two scenarios would have very different impacts on the prison population under this bill, which would increase the range for this group to between 17% and 37%.

HB 2256 is simpler: it would dramatically increase the minimum time served for individuals with prior non-dangerous felony convictions, and thus would certainly increase the prison population, without providing any additional public safety benefit.

Both of these bills reduce incentives for individuals in prison to participate in programming, undermining both recidivism reduction efforts and behavior in prison causing more problems for an already understaffed and overcrowded prison system. Finally, Missouri's taxpayers would be paying approximately \$30,000 additional dollars per person per additional year to keep these individuals incarcerated. Multiplied by thousands of people in prison, either of these bills could cost the state tens to hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. Increased prison population without an increased investment of resources is a recipe for disaster.

This is a Solution in Search of a Problem

From 2009-2023, 38 states saw reductions in crime while incarcerating fewer people, with violent crime rates falling 8% in states that reduced imprisonment while going up 16% in states that increased imprisonment. Since Missouri's prison population began to decline in 2017, the state's crime rate has dropped 25%. Because of the recent reductions in the prison population and other reforms passed by this body in 2017, the Department of Corrections has also successfully reduced recidivism rates for people released from prison. Although there is always more that can be done, there is no reason to believe that reversing the successful course of reform and increasing the prison population will make Missouri safer.

Moreover, the proposal under consideration in HB 2637 would not increase certainty or transparency in the sentencing system, the stated goals of this effort. Currently, each offense is assigned a parole eligibility threshold. Under this bill, each offense would be assigned a range of potential parole eligibility thresholds, within which the judge would select a threshold — or more likely, a threshold would be negotiated as part of a plea deal. By allowing for a range of thresholds, this bill actually reduces certainty in the system, instead increasing severity, which research shows is not an important factor in reducing recidivism or increasing public safety.

Not the Right Move for Safety, the Economy, or the Budget

Increasing the amount of time people spend in prison will worsen Missouri's prison staffing problems, make prisons in the state less safe, increase recidivism, and waste limited taxpayer resources. FWD.us urges this committee to oppose and vote no on HB 2637 and HB 2256. Thank you for your time and consideration.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: MATTHEW CHARLES		PHONE NUMBER: 615-428-8206	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: FAMM		TITLE: STATE LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS MANAGER	
ADDRESS:			
CITY: NASHVILLE		STATE: TN	ZIP: 37208
EMAIL: mcharles@famm.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/27/2026 1:28 PM	
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Dear Chair Parker, Vice Chair Reuter, and Ranking Minority Member Smith, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding House Bill 2637 and House Bill 2256. My name is Matthew Charles. I was sentenced to thirty-five years in federal prison in 1996 for drug offenses. I served 22 years before becoming a beneficiary of the First Step Act, which is President Trump’s landmark criminal justice legislation. I was the first beneficiary and was honored to attend the State of the Union address as President Trump’s guest in 2019. The President spoke about the new law implementing earned credits off prison sentences and how I was a success story and not someone who needed to go back to prison. Since then, I have traveled the country speaking with state and federal lawmakers about my experience.

I testify today on behalf of FAMM, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to create a more fair and effective justice system that respects our American values of individual accountability and dignity while keeping communities safe. We advocate sentencing policies that are individualized and fair, protect public safety, and preserve families.

These bills contain provisions called truth-in-sentencing (TIS) that would significantly increase the percentage of sentences that Missourians would be required to serve in state-run, taxpayer funded prisons. We ask you to vote “no” for the following reasons.

These bills are unnecessary as people in are staying in Missouri prisons longer than they were in previous years. DOC data clearly show that the average amount of time people in Missouri spent in prison rose by 11.2% between FY 2018 and 2023. This amendment “fixes” a problem that doesn’t exist.

These bills will waste more than \$84 million and up to \$1 billion of Missouri taxpayers’ money without a discernible public safety benefit. The Fiscal Note estimates \$84 million dollar in expenditures in 10 years without benefitting taxpayers. It also states that the state could have to foot the cost of building a new prison to accommodate all the additional and extra prison commitments because of these bills. The true cost will be even more, as the state’s prisons are significantly understaffed, and overtime is extremely costly. Keeping people in prison and building new prisons without a public safety benefit is absurdly expensive, wasting resources that could otherwise be invested in crime prevention.

For example, 62 percent of violent crimes reported to police in Missouri in 2023 were not solved, down 12 percentage points from the solve rate in 2013. These \$27 million dollars would be far better spent testing rape kits, DNA, and supporting violent crime case closure.

This Committee should be focusing its time and attention on preventing crime rather than making sentences longer for the smaller percentage of people apprehended. The public safety issue is not that Missourians are not spending enough time in prison.

TIS laws remove a vital tool of correctional officers, because they limit and prevent the prison's ability to incentivize rehabilitation through programming and good behavior. These laws can lead to worse behavior in prison and higher recidivism once people are released. Good behavior and programming incentives are important tools for corrections staff. The Missouri Department of Corrections is understaffed and needs more tools like good and earned time credits, not less. President Trump's signature criminal justice legislation, the First Step Act, increased federal access to good and earned time credit. Missouri should follow suit instead of going in the opposite direction.

When Arizona eliminated parole and earned time credits in 1993, prison rule violations increased by 50 percent, enrollment in educational programs dropped by 20 percent, and the reoffending rate jumped 4.8 percentage points. When Georgia limited parole eligibility in 1998, there was a 15 percent increase in prison rule violations, 14 percent decline in rehabilitative program participation, and 5- to 7-point increase in the recidivism rate.

These bills are unlikely to prevent crime. Researchers have found no evidence that severe sentencing policies deter people from engaging in criminal activity. It is the certainty of being caught and swiftly punished, not the length of punishment, that deters crime. The vast majority of people who commit crimes – even very serious crimes – naturally grow out of criminal behavior as they mature. TIS laws keep many people incarcerated long past the point at which they have become low risk for reoffending.

The Missouri Sentencing Advisory Commission, a legislatively created commission dating back to 1993, now hosts a public tool that clarifies how much of a sentence someone will serve – negating the need for any further “truth” in sentencing. The Missouri Time Served Calculator was created in response to feedback that victims and the public should have better information about prison sentences. It is available at <https://www.courts.mo.gov/sentencing-calc/>.

These bills hurt Missouri families. By keeping family members in prison longer with no discernible benefit, TIS harms families and contributes to poverty by keeping people on the state rolls when they could be working. When someone is incarcerated, their families “do the time” with them. The incarcerated individual can no longer contribute to the household income, which often makes it difficult for their families to meet basic needs, such as food, housing, and utilities. Plus, many family members spend hundreds of dollars a month to visit, call, and email their loved ones and to provide prison commissary funding for toiletries and other essentials. The emotional and psychological toll of the incarcerated individual's absence from major milestones and day-to-day life is horrendous. Children of incarcerated parents experience significantly higher rates of mental health, educational, behavioral, developmental, and relationship problems than their peers. Similarly, incarceration is associated with negative mental and physical health consequences for adult family members.

FAMM urges the Committee to vote “no” on House Bill 2637 and House Bill 2256 today. We urge you to advance legislation that makes effective, evidence-based public safety investments. Thank you for considering our views. Please contact us at mcharles@famm.org and mgoellner@famm.org if you have any questions or need assistance.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL DREYER		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 10:07 PM	

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Decades of research have shown that longer sentences don't reduce crime—but they do cost Missouri taxpayers millions and worsen our already understaffed prison system. Over thirty states have repealed or reformed their mandatory minimum laws in the past two decades while keeping communities safe. Missouri should follow their lead—not waste resources on ineffective policies. That's why national conservative criminal justice organizations, including the American Conservative Union, Right on Crime, and Unify Us, oppose this bill.

The proposed changes would come at a high cost. Last year's HB 862, which was nearly identical to HB 2256, carried a lofty fiscal note: when fully implemented, costs to the state were estimated at \$280 million annually, requiring 130 additional full-time employees. HB 2637 will likely carry an even higher fiscal note, due to the more sweeping changes proposed in that bill. Missouri prisons continue to experience significant understaffing challenges, and the annual cost to incarcerate someone in Missouri has increased over \$10,000 over the last ten years to \$31,923. Especially at a time when the legislature is considering moving towards removing the individual income tax, we simply cannot afford these proposals. We should be supporting policies that would reduce our reliance on the corrections system, not compound it.

Increasing minimum sentences will increase both the prison population and corrections costs without making our state safer. Please oppose HB 2256 and HB 2637 to expand prison terms.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: PATRICIA PREWITT		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 1/27/2026 4:49 PM
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I served nearly 40 years in MO prisons for a crime I didn't commit, and during those decades I saw the detriment caused by long prison sentences. The time in prison keeps getting longer, which costs the state more and more and damages families. Mercy and rehabilitation work much better, more humanely and more cost effective.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: RONALD BERRY		PHONE NUMBER: 660-537-2239	
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We believe this bill will actually lengthen sentence terms and is a solution in search of a problem. Increasing time -served requirements undermine data driven solutions that help reduce misconduct and violence in prisons and will make MO prisons less safe for incarcerated people and staff.



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: SAGE CORAM		PHONE NUMBER:
REPRESENTING: AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF MISSOURI		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY: ST. LOUIS	STATE: MO	ZIP: 63101
EMAIL: scoram@aclu-mo.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2026 7:18 PM
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