



**SPAC**

**Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council**

**2024  
ANNUAL  
REPORT**

Chair Person:  
John Cullerton

Executive Director:  
Victoria Gonzalez

[www.spac.illinois.gov](http://www.spac.illinois.gov)

## Purpose

The Sentencing Policy Advisory Council's purpose is to provide policymakers with sound data and analysis to inform evidence-based public safety policy decisions.

### *Composition and Membership:*

The Council consists of the following members:

- (A) the President of the Senate, or his or her designee;
- (B) the Minority Leader of the Senate, or his or her designee;
- (C) the Speaker of the House, or his or her designee;
- (D) the Minority Leader of the House, or his or her designee;
- (E) the Governor, or his or her designee;
- (F) the Attorney General, or his or her designee;
- (G) two retired judges,
- (H) the Cook County State's Attorney, or his or her designee;
- (I) the Cook County Public Defender, or his or her designee;
- (J) a State's Attorney not from Cook County,
- (K) the State Appellate Defender, or his or her designee;
- (L) the Director of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, or his or her designee;
- (M) a victim of a violent felony or a representative of a crime victims' organization
- (N) a representative of a community-based organization,
- (O) a criminal justice academic researcher
- (P) a representative of law enforcement from a unit of local government
- (Q) a sheriff outside of Cook County

Ex-Officio Members are:

- (i) the Director of Corrections, or his or her designee;
- (ii) the Chair of the Prisoner Review Board, or his or her designee;
- (iii) the Director of the Illinois State Police, or his or her designee;
- (iv) the Director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, or his or her designee;
- (v) the Cook County Sheriff, or his or her designee.

## What's New

2024 was a year of growth and change at SPAC. Notably, Victoria Gonzalez's completed her first full year as SPAC Executive Director and John Specker completed his first full year as Government Affairs and Communications Advisor. SPAC reorganized into two teams, the Research Team, led by Mark Powers, and the Policy Education Team, led by John Specker.

SPAC hired Michael Varrige joining the Policy Education team as SPAC's first legal counsel. SPAC is currently going through the recruitment process to hire two researchers for the Research Team and a confidential assistant for the Policy Education Team. SPAC bid farewell to Stevenson Fellow Katherine Sebok who completed her fellowship this year.

SPAC's Policy Education Team expanded SPAC's publications to include an education series which provides introductions to various criminal justice related topics, referred to as the *101 Series*. The series so far has covered topics such as prison and probation sentences, assault vs. battery, and controlled substances schedules and crimes. Each document features a visually engaging summary on the first page, followed on the second page with detailed information for those seeking a deeper understanding of the topic. SPAC is happy to take suggestions for future topics.

Legislatively, SPAC has a new statutory mandate to study sentencing disparity. HB3421 was passed by both houses in the 103<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly and signed by the Governor on July 19, 2024, which is when it went into effect and became Public Act 103-0657. The act requires that SPAC "[s]tudy and identify discriminatory practices in sentencing across this State and make recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly regarding ways to remedy those discriminatory practices". SPAC is working to implement this mandate into its workflow and will provide updates as relevant.

SPAC presented to the Illinois Senate Committee on Criminal Law and Public Safety on February 7, 2024. Director Gonzalez along with Mark Powers and John Specker presented on SPAC's mission as well as trends in the Illinois Criminal Justice System. This presentation is available on SPAC's website and SPAC looks forward to the opportunity to make future presentations to the Legislature and other stakeholders.

SPAC attended the National Association of Sentencing Commissions (NASC) annual meeting, which took place from August 6 through August 8 in Raleigh, North Carolina. The theme of this year's conference was looking back at 30 years of NASC gatherings. SPAC staff members attend panels covering various topics related to criminal justice and sentencing commissions. Director Gonzalez spoke on a panel about what states with sentencing guidelines can learn from states without sentencing guidelines, like Illinois.

## Staffing and Budget

In 2024, SPAC's staff included Executive Director Victoria Gonzalez, Research Director Mark Powers, Government Affairs and Communications Advisor John Specker, and Legal Counsel Michael Varrige. Katherine Sebok, a Stevenson Fellow from Illinois State University worked with SPAC until she completed her fellowship in May. As of December 2024, SPAC had two vacancies for Research Analysts which SPAC expects to fill in early 2025. SPAC also had a vacancy for a Confidential Assistant for which SPAC initiated recruitment in December 2024.

SPAC's appropriation for fiscal year 2024 was 852,500.

## Meetings

In 2024, SPAC held Council meetings in June, September, and November.

### June

In June, SPAC staff presented a proposed strategic plan for the agency's next 15 years and felony trends for adults in Illinois from 2010 to 2022.

Director Gonzalez and Katherine Sebok presented the strategic plan to the Council. The strategic plan, developed by SPAC staff, serves as a roadmap to guide the agency for the next 15 years. The plan highlights SPAC's core values of being responsive, collaborative, objective, and Illinois focused. The strategic plan presented five key goals to ensure SPAC's sustainability and long-term success. To view the strategic plan, click [here](#).

Mark Powers presented trends in the Illinois' Adult Felony system from 2010 to 2022, based on SPAC's first-ever felony trends report published in early 2024. This presentation highlighted key patterns in arrests, convictions, and sentencing within the adult felony system in Illinois. To read the full trends report, click [here](#).

### September

In September, the Illinois Department of Corrections hosted SPAC's council meeting at the Northern Reception and Classification Center. IDOC staff presented to council members and staff each portion of the reception and initial classification process that takes place when incarcerated persons arrived at IDOC. Assistant Warden of Operations JeanMarie Case provided background information on IDOC's facilities for reception throughout Illinois and what occurs on an individual's first day in custody. Then, Brian Page, Psy. D., explained how the mental health review takes place for each individual as they come into IDOC's custody. Sunina Chacko, DNP, explained the Classification Center's healthcare unit and its capabilities.

IDOC also provided an explanation as to how each incarcerated person receives a security classification and the process for transferring them to their parent facility within the Department. After the presentations, IDOC staff took members and staff on a tour of the Reception and Classification Center, where members and staff were able to see the main

inmate processing center and they were able to observe each stage of the reception process while individuals were being admitted to DOC. Council members and staff were also given a tour of cell blocks to see where individuals are housed before they are transferred to a fully serviceable facility.

## November

In November, SPAC's council meeting focused on a new series of publications and a presentation on risk and needs assessments by the Illinois Department of Corrections.

John Specker and Michael Varrige presented the *101 series*, a new series of publications created by the Policy Education Team. These resources are designed to educate stakeholders by summarizing key aspects of the criminal justice system in Illinois. Each document features a visually engaging summary on the first page, followed on the second page with detailed information for those seeking a deeper understanding of the topic.

Chief Jennifer Parack from the Illinois Department of Corrections presented on risk and needs assessments in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). The presentation highlighted the various risk and needs assessments utilized by IDOC. Chief Parrack provided an overview of these assessments, their applicability, and their integration into case planning.

## Publications

SPAC generally has three publication types, impact analyses, annual publications, and detailed research reports on different aspects of the Illinois criminal justice system. As noted above, this year SPAC added an additional publication type, the *101 series*.

### *Impact Analyses:*

SPAC published Impact analyses of the following bills:

- HB4331: Proposed increasing sentences for manufacture and delivery of fentanyl.
- HB5037: Proposed making firearm enhancements of various offenses discretionary rather than mandatory.
- HB5219: Proposed removing all Truth-in-Sentencing restrictions sentence credits.
- SB2158: Proposed various changes around registration requirements in Illinois.

To view all the fiscal impacts in detail, click [here](#).

### *Research Reports:*

SPAC published 'Trends Report 2010 – 2022'. This document examines felony trends in arrests, convictions, sentencing, and the correctional population in Illinois. To view this document, click [here](#).

SPAC published ‘Public Acts 103<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (2023 Session)’ which provides a summary of public acts that impact the criminal justice system in Illinois. To review this document, click [here](#).

### *101 Series*

SPAC published various publications in the 101 series. Including Felony Sentence structure 101, Prison 101, Probation 101, Sentence Credits 101, Assault and Battery 101, Controlled Substances 101, and Risk and Needs Assessment Roadmap. To view those publications, click [here](#).

## **Statutory Mandates**

SPAC is statutorily mandated to provide population projections for IDOC and probation, provide analysis of the Safe Neighborhoods Reform Act, and the presentence investigation (PSI) reports for Class 3 and 4 admissions to IDOC who had not previously been sentenced to probation. In the 2024 session of the 103<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, PA103-0657 was signed into law mandating SPAC study discriminatory sentencing patterns in Illinois.

SPAC published an updated prison population projection, to view that publication, click [here](#).

SPAC did not have reliable data to publish a probation population projection.

SPAC did not have sufficient data to provide an update on the number of PSIs conducted for Class 3 and 4 first-time prison sentences who had not been sentenced to probation previously.

The aspect of the Safe Neighborhoods Act that SPAC was mandated to study sunset in 2024, therefore no report was published.

SPAC is working on implementing the new statutory mandate to study discrimination in sentencing.

## Appendix

### Sec. 5-8-8. Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council.

(a) Creation. There is created under the jurisdiction of the Governor the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, hereinafter referred to as the Council.

(b) Purposes and goals. The purpose of the Council is to review sentencing policies and practices and examine how these policies and practices impact the criminal justice system as a whole in the State of Illinois. In carrying out its duties, the Council shall be mindful of and aim to achieve the purposes of sentencing in Illinois, which are set out in Section 1-1-2 of this Code:

(1) prescribe sanctions proportionate to the seriousness of the offenses and permit the recognition of differences in rehabilitation possibilities among individual offenders;

(2) forbid and prevent the commission of offenses;

(3) prevent arbitrary or oppressive treatment of persons adjudicated offenders or delinquents; and

(4) restore offenders to useful citizenship.

(c) Council composition.

(1) The Council shall consist of the following members:

(A) the President of the Senate, or his or her designee;

(B) the Minority Leader of the Senate, or his or her designee;



- (C) the Speaker of the House, or his or her designee;
- (D) the Minority Leader of the House, or his or her designee;
- (E) the Governor, or his or her designee;
- (F) the Attorney General, or his or her designee;
- (G) two retired judges, who may have been circuit, appellate, or supreme court judges; retired judges shall be selected by the members of the Council designated in clauses (c)(1)(A) through (L);
- (G-5) (blank);
- (H) the Cook County State's Attorney, or his or her designee;
- (I) the Cook County Public Defender, or his or her designee;
- (J) a State's Attorney not from Cook County, appointed by the State's Attorney's Appellate Prosecutor;
- (K) the State Appellate Defender, or his or her designee;
- (L) the Director of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, or his or her designee;
- (M) a victim of a violent felony or a representative of a crime victims' organization, selected by the members of the Council designated in clauses (c)(1)(A) through (L);
- (N) a representative of a community-based organization, selected by the members of the Council designated in clauses (c)(1)(A) through (L);
- (O) a criminal justice academic researcher, to be selected by the members of the Council designated in clauses (c)(1)(A) through (L);
- (P) a representative of law enforcement from a unit of local government to be selected by the members of the Council designated in clauses (c)(1)(A) through (L);
- (Q) a sheriff outside of Cook County selected by the members of the Council designated in clauses (c)(1)(A) through (L); and
- (R) ex-officio members shall include:
  - (i) the Director of Corrections, or his or her designee;
  - (ii) the Chair of the Prisoner Review Board, or his or her designee;
  - (iii) the Director of the Illinois State Police, or his or her designee;

(iv) the Director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, or his or her designee; and

(v) the Cook County Sheriff, or his or her designee.

(1.5) The Chair and Vice Chair shall be elected from among its members by a majority of the members of the Council.

(2) Members of the Council who serve because of their public office or position, or those who are designated as members by such officials, shall serve only as long as they hold such office or position.

(3) Council members shall serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for travel and per diem expenses incurred in their work for the Council.

(4) The Council may exercise any power, perform any function, take any action, or do anything in furtherance of its purposes and goals upon the appointment of a quorum of its members. The term of office of each member of the Council ends on the date of repeal of this amendatory Act of the 96th General Assembly.

(5) The Council shall determine the qualifications for and hire the Executive Director.

(d) Duties. The Council shall perform, as resources permit, duties including:

(1) Collect and analyze information including sentencing data, crime trends, and existing correctional resources to support legislative and executive action affecting the use of correctional resources on the State and local levels.

(2) Prepare criminal justice population projections annually, including correctional and community-based supervision populations.

(3) Analyze data relevant to proposed sentencing legislation and its effect on current policies or practices, and provide information to support evidence-based sentencing.

(4) Ensure that adequate resources and facilities are available for carrying out sentences imposed on offenders and that rational priorities are established for the use of those resources. To do so, the Council shall prepare criminal justice resource statements, identifying the fiscal and practical effects of proposed criminal sentencing legislation, including, but not limited to, the correctional population, court processes, and county or local government resources.

(4.5) Study and conduct a thorough analysis of sentencing under Section 5-4.5-110 of this Code. The Sentencing Policy Advisory Council shall provide annual reports to the Governor and General Assembly, including the total number of persons sentenced under Section 5-4.5-110 of this Code, the total number of departures from sentences under Section 5-4.5-110 of



this Code, and an analysis of trends in sentencing and departures. On or before December 31, 2022, the Sentencing Policy Advisory Council shall provide a report to the Governor and General Assembly on the effectiveness of sentencing under Section 5-4.5-110 of this Code, including recommendations on whether sentencing under Section 5-4.5-110 of this Code should be adjusted or continued.

(4.6) Study and identify discriminatory practices in sentencing across this State and make recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly regarding ways to remedy those discriminatory practices.

(5) Perform such other studies or tasks pertaining to sentencing policies as may be requested by the Governor or the Illinois General Assembly.

(6) Perform such other functions as may be required by law or as are necessary to carry out the purposes and goals of the Council prescribed in subsection (b).

(7) Publish a report on the trends in sentencing for offenders described in subsection (b-1) of Section 5-4-1 of this Code, the impact of the trends on the prison and probation populations, and any changes in the racial composition of the prison and probation populations that can be attributed to the changes made by adding subsection (b-1) of Section 5-4-1 to this Code by Public Act 99-861.

(e) Authority.

(1) The Council shall have the power to perform the functions necessary to carry out its duties, purposes and goals under this Act. In so doing, the Council shall utilize information and analysis developed by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, and the Illinois Department of Corrections.

(2) Upon request from the Council, each executive agency and department of State and local government shall provide information and records to the Council in the execution of its duties.

(f) Report. The Council shall report in writing annually to the General Assembly, the Illinois Supreme Court, and the Governor.

(g) (Blank).

(Source: P.A. 103-657, eff. 7-19-24.)