

Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council

Regular Meeting Minutes

June 21, 2024 10am – 11:45pm

Location: Michael A. Bilandic Building and Virtual

160 N La Salle St, Chicago, IL 60601. Room N502

Chicago, IL

Members Present in Person

Rep. Justin Slaughter, Chair Cullerton, Patricia Jjemba, Scott Main, Elizabeth Leahy

Members Present by Video

Sen. Elgie Sims, Christelle Perez, Doug Harvath, Daniel Hunt, Augie Torres, Don Stemen, Anne Fitzgerald, Latoya Hughes, Tim Lavery

Members Absent-

Rep. Patrick Windhorst, Sen. Steve McClure, Don Bernardi, Julia Reitz, Lisa Daniels, Mitchell Davis, Ron Hain

Non-Members Present in Person or by Video

Victoria Gonzalez, Mark Powers, John Specker, Michael Varrige, Katie Sebok, Paula Wolff, Laura Davis, Jim Montgomery, Karissa Zingula, Sarah Blatt-Herold, Ardyn Chin, Ashton Hoselton, Ben Ruddell, Caitlyn Rothenberg, Saylor Pershing, Sharon Shipinski, Jacob Schlosser, Stephanie Kollmann

Welcome, Introductions & Updates

Chairperson Cullerton called the forty-fourth regular meeting of the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council to order at 10:04 a.m. Chairperson Cullerton welcomed Jim Montgomery, the new Acting Executive Director of the Prisoner Review Board, and Elizabeth Leahy, the new designee from the Illinois State Police. Chairperson Cullerton then had SPAC's Executive Director Victoria Gonzalez take the roll.

Chairperson Cullerton reviewed the agenda for the meeting stating there would be an Executive Director's Report, a presentation about SPAC's proposed Strategic Plan, and a presentation about the Trends Report that SPAC published in March.

Vote: Approval of the Minutes from the June 2023 Meeting

Chairperson Cullerton called for a motion to approve the Minutes from SPAC's November Meeting. Senator Sims moved to approve the minutes from the November 2023 meeting, Doug Harvath seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Chairperson Cullerton then asked Director Gonzalez to provide the Executive Director's Report.

Executive Director's Report

Director Gonzalez's Report included reminding those council members who are not exempt from annual State-mandated trainings to complete their training requirements. She introduced SPAC's new staff member, Michael Varrige, SPAC's first legal counsel. Director Gonzalez also noted the vacancies that SPAC currently has due to changes in the State hiring process. Finally, Director Gonzalez notified the council about the upcoming National Association of Sentencing Commission's Annual Conference, which is being held in Raleigh, North Carolina in August and encouraged interested council members to reach out about joining SPAC staff at the conference.

There were no questions or discussion about this topic.

Strategic Plan Presentation

Chair Cullerton introduced SPAC's Executive Director Victoria Gonzalez and SPAC's Stevenson Fellow Katie Sebok to present SPAC's Proposed Strategic Plan.

Director Gonzalez introduced the presentation and asked Ms. Sebok to present. Ms. Sebok presented information about the purpose of the strategic plan, the background of SPAC as an agency, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis that the SPAC team performed, and the core values that the agency identified. The core values adopted are that SPAC is Responsive, Collaborative, Objective, and Illinois-Focused.

Director Gonzalez presented the five goals of the agency moving forward. These goals are to reinforce the current infrastructure of SPAC, review publications and ensure they can be provided sustainably and look for ways to improve their accessibility and usefulness, revise and update the various cost benefit models that SPAC uses, expand SPAC's policy team, and reinforce the data sources that SPAC utilizes.

Chairperson Cullerton expressed the importance of bi-partisanship and noted that SPAC is well situated for it, given its equal number of the Senate and the House on the Council. Chairperson Cullerton then opened the floor to any members who wished to ask questions.

Representative Slaughter asked for more context on the goal of expanding SPAC's policy team. He emphasized importance of integrating the research and data with policy analysis to help policymakers in crafting effective policy. Director Gonzalez responded that the goal is to elevate SPAC's work to the next level by providing additional context about the proposal. This includes understanding the policy objectives and assessing their potential impact. Representative Slaughter commented that this lends itself well to implementation and bringing the stakeholders together.

Patricia Jjemba asked if the policy team would be proposing legislation or solely providing context. Director Gonzalez responded say that the policy team will not advance any legislation and any legislation that it appeared SPAC was supporting would be administrative to help the policy makers achieve the desired outcome.

Scott Main asked about how the policy team would go about understanding the policy that the proposal is trying to achieve. Director Gonzalez responded that it would require meeting with as many stakeholders as possible to understand the policy for the different perspectives and distilling that information. Director Gonzalez provided an example of how this process worked in her previous role as the Director of the Nevada Sentencing Commission.

Mr. Main followed with a question if there was any tension between the stated core value of objectiveness and the goal of expanding the policy team. Director Gonzalez responded that it is a delicate balance. She emphasized the most important aspect of the process is to develop trust and bridging the gap between stakeholders to help develop a fuller picture.

Presentation of the Felony Trends Report

Chairperson Cullerton introduced SPAC's Research Director, Mark Powers, to present on the Felony Trends in Illinois 2010 – 2022 Report that SPAC published in March.

Mr. Powers' presentation described trends in the US Census counts in Illinois, felony arrests, guilty dispositions, and prison admissions, exits and the prison population. Mr. Powers also explained the concept of Bayesian Improved Surname Geo-Coding (BISG) that SPAC utilized in the felony trends report.

Chair Cullerton thanked SPAC Staff Mark Powers for the presentation and asked about the recidivism rates and how Illinois compared to other states. Chairperson Cullerton also inquired about Truth-in-Sentencing (TIS) including when that law came into effect and legislative proposals to revise the credit restrictions. Mr. Powers stated additional research would be needed to answer to provide insight on recidivism rates. He explained when TIS laws were enacted and stated there have been recent proposals to revise TIS in Illinois. Rep. Slaughter commented on the legislative proposals revising TIS laws.

Council Member Augie Torres asked about the older population the system. Specifically, about how did the aging population in the system come to be, was it a result of older people being arrested and admitted to prison more frequently or is it because younger people are aging into the older population while in prison. SPAC Staff Powers answered that the aging population is a result of multiple factors that include both young people aging into the older population and older people being arrested and admitted more frequently.

Council Member Leahy asked what is causing the declines in arrests, guilty dispositions, and prison admissions. SPAC Staff Powers responded that the answer would require more research, but it appears that law enforcement at the front end has resulted in many of the declines to guilty dispositions and admissions. Director Gonzalez noted that the policy team of SPAC will aim to answer those questions about trends that data is unable to answer going forward.

Scott Main asked about the 2015 commission and if SPAC could model where the criminal justice system would be if the State had implemented all of those reforms. SPAC Staff Powers responded that we could attempt to answer those questions, but it would require assumptions.

Rep. Slaughter asked about the current population and Acting Director Hughes stated the population was 29,078.

Public Comment

No Public Comment

New Business

SPAC's next meeting is September 20th, 2024 at 10 am.

Adjournment

Senator Elgie Sims motioned to adjourn. Rep Slaughter seconded. Motion passed unanimously.