

ONE HUNDRED FOURTH LEGISLATURE

SECOND SESSION

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 527

Introduced by Schumacher, 22.

PURPOSE: An increasing number of states and the federal government have undertaken various degrees of criminal sentencing reform. State and federal policymakers have also begun to widely question the propriety of mandatory minimum sentencing laws.

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws require a minimum prison term of a particular length. With such laws judges have no discretion to go lower than the minimum sentence and probation is not an option. In Nebraska, an inmate serving a mandatory minimum sentence will not earn or receive good time credit for his or her behavior while serving the mandatory sentence.

Proponents of mandatory minimum sentences argue that these schemes reduce crime by acting as a general deterrent for potential criminals and repeat offenders. Proponents also contend that eliminating judicial discretion provides for fairness and uniformity in sentencing.

While these inflexible, one-size-fits-all sentencing laws may have initial appeal as a response to certain types of crimes, such laws fail to advance proportional justice because they prevent a judge from fitting punishment to the individual defendant and the exact circumstances of his or her crime.

In the last few legislative sessions, various members of the Legislature have introduced bills to limit or eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for some categories or types of crime or to amend the procedures which prosecutors must follow in prosecuting crimes that carry mandatory minimum sentences.

The purpose of this interim study is to examine possible legislative reforms to Nebraska's mandatory minimum sentencing laws. The study shall include the following:

- (1) A review of current mandatory minimum sentences presently in statute;

(2) A review of the types of crimes which carry mandatory minimum sentences;

(3) A review of the process by which a mandatory minimum sentence may be sought, for example, by election or choice of the prosecuting attorney or by authorization of a judge or a panel of judges;

(4) A consideration of an exemption or a safety-valve for a defendant who is convicted of a crime carrying a mandatory minimum sentence, whereby the sentencing judge or a panel of judges may deviate or decide not to impose the mandatory minimum sentence if the sentencing judge or panel finds that certain mitigating factors exist; and

(5) A review and examination of any potential consequences of implementing statutory changes to the mandatory minimum sentencing laws, with respect to amending penalty provisions, amending the procedures for filing charges carrying mandatory minimum sentences, or amending the procedures governing the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, SECOND SESSION:

1. That the Judiciary Committee of the Legislature shall be designated to conduct an interim study to carry out the purposes of this resolution.

2. That the committee shall upon the conclusion of its study make a report of its findings, together with its recommendations, to the Legislative Council or Legislature.