

MEMORANDUM

To: Justice Action Network
From: OnMessage Polling
Date: January 27, 2022
Re: Missouri Statewide Criminal Justice Reform Survey



OnMessage is pleased to present key findings from a statewide poll of 500 likely voters in Missouri. The survey was conducted January 15-18, 2022 by live interviewers contacting landlines and cell phones. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 4.4%.

In a broad sense, our poll finds strong, bipartisan support for:

- The idea criminal justice reform is necessary;
- Specific proposals currently before the legislature; and
- Reforms other states have enacted but where Missouri is falling short.

Support derives from voters from both parties as well as households with a victim of violent crime or a member of law enforcement. Proposals supported by voters include keeping individual charged with low-level offenses out of pre-trial jail, phasing in “clean slate” policies to expunge criminal records, limiting misdemeanor probation sentences to 18 months, establishing a Correctional Center Nursery Program, and limiting bench warrants issued for traffic violations.

Missouri voters believe the state’s criminal justice needs improvements.

- A large majority of voters (70%) — including majorities of Republicans (62%), households which include victims of violent crime (79%), and law enforcement households (70%) — believe “the criminal justice system here in Missouri needs improvement.”

Missouri voters support policies that automatically expunge and/or seal criminal records

- 72% of Missouri voters, including two-thirds of Republicans, agree “Missouri should allow people with less serious criminal records, who have remained crime-free for a period of time, to seal or expunge their records so they have a better shot of finding jobs and supporting their families.”

Missouri voters of all political backgrounds support keeping people out of jail pre-trial for misdemeanors and other minor offenses.

- In 2019, nearly 2,500 people were booked into St. Louis County jails for a misdemeanor. More than 4,700 were booked for a “crime against society,” which includes trespassing or loitering.¹
- Over 70% of all voters, with bipartisan majorities, support having people charged with “minor crimes like trespassing or intoxication” (79%) or “misdemeanors” (72%) remain in the community while awaiting trial rather than being held in jail.
- Moreover, 67% say “Rather than face arrest by the police, people with mental illness or addiction accused of low-level crimes should be diverted to treatment that addresses what led to their behavior.”
 - Only 13% express the belief “people accused of [low-level crimes that may be linked to their mental illness or addiction] should be held in jail while they await trial.”

Nearly two-thirds of Missourians support limiting misdemeanor sentencing to 18 months.

- Fully 64% of voters in Missouri, including majorities across party lines as well as 84% of law enforcement households, support setting “the maximum sentence for misdemeanors and ordinance violations to 18 months.”

A robust majority supports banning bench warrants for traffic fines or missed hearings.

- A majority (58%) support a proposal eliminating the practice of issuing bench warrants, while still allowing fines to be referred to collections, “if a person fails to appear in court for traffic ticket violations or fails to pay a fine assessed for a minor traffic violation.”

Voters support a proposal requiring the establishment of a Correctional Center Nursery Program.

- This proposal enjoys majority (55%) bipartisan support for requiring “the Missouri Department of Corrections to establish a Correctional Center Nursery Program that would allow inmates who are mothers of infants to reside with their infant children for up to 18 months.”

¹ https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PEW_JAIL_REPORT_Final_St.LouisCounty1.pdf