



SPAC

Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Chair Person:
John Cullerton

Executive Director:
Victoria Gonzalez

www.spac.illinois.gov

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Augie Torres, Reading Between the Lines
Rep. Patrick Windhorst, Illinois House of Representatives

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Introduction

The Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council (SPAC) is required to report in writing annually to the General Assembly, the Illinois Supreme Court, and the Governor (730 ILCS 5/5-8-8(f)). This report is intended to satisfy this mandate.

Message from Executive Director

SPAC's purpose and mission is to provide data and research to policymakers to promote a data-driven criminal justice system. Relying on data and research should result in a criminal justice system that is fair and safe.

In an unpredictable world, it is natural to want to feel safe. If and when the world feels unsafe, using research and data to make decisions that will continue to keep us safe *and* be fair is vital. Tough times put our priorities and values to the test. When tough times come, remember what is important to you, your loved ones, and our community.

As stakeholders and the public consider policy changes and use data and research to inform those changes, remember the stated purposes of sentencing provided in 730 ILCS 5/1-1-2:

- prescribe sanctions proportionate to the seriousness of the offenses and permit the recognition of differences in rehabilitation possibilities among individual offenders;
- forbid and prevent the commission of offenses;
- prevent arbitrary or oppressive treatment of persons adjudicated offenders or delinquents; and
- restore offenders to useful citizenship.

These purposes do not operate independently or proportionally. They are all at play in sentencing and in our criminal justice policies and are being applied at different degrees, depending on the policy or sentence. Our criminal justice system will serve us best when we consider these with intentionality.

SPAC is non-partisan and does not advance any specific policy or platform. SPAC promotes reliable information and input to inform policy. Thank you to those of you who consistently reach out and request information to make decisions. Even if we don't have data, we can provide objective insight to inform your decision.

Be informed when developing and revising policy. Be intentional with the purposes. We look forward to working with you in 2026.

Yours in data and research,



Victoria Gonzalez
Executive Director

Statutory Mandates

SPAC is statutorily mandated to: provide population projections for Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and probation; analyze the Safe Neighborhoods Reform Act; study presentence investigation (PSI) reports for Class 3 and 4 admissions to IDOC who had not previously been sentenced to probation; and study discrimination in sentencing.

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 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. The first step in satisfying the mandate is the report SPAC published explaining the Race/Ethnicity adjustment methodology and then implementing this methodology when examining criminal justice data in Illinois.

Mission

We provide reliable data, research, and policy analysis to lawmakers and criminal justice stakeholders to inform decisions related to developing sentencing and corrections legislation and policies.

Core Values

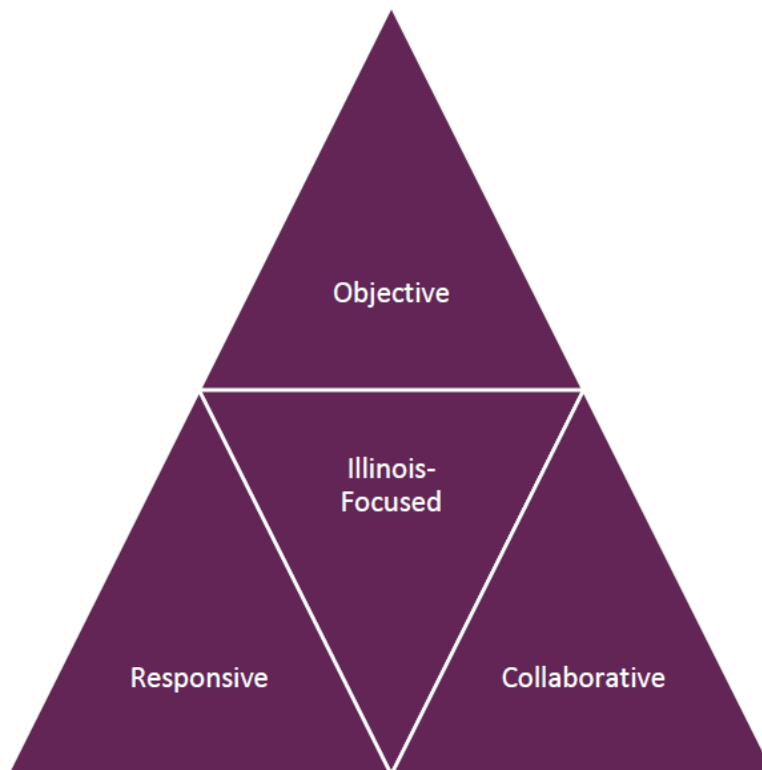
SPAC's data, research, and policy analysis are guided by four core values:

Responsive – We respond to requests and feedback from stakeholders, lawmakers, and the public, and we adapt as methodologies and access to data evolves.

Illinois-Focused – We provide data, research and analysis specific to the policies, priorities, and infrastructure of Illinois.

Collaborative – We build strong and cooperative relationships with lawmakers, criminal justice stakeholders, and the public.

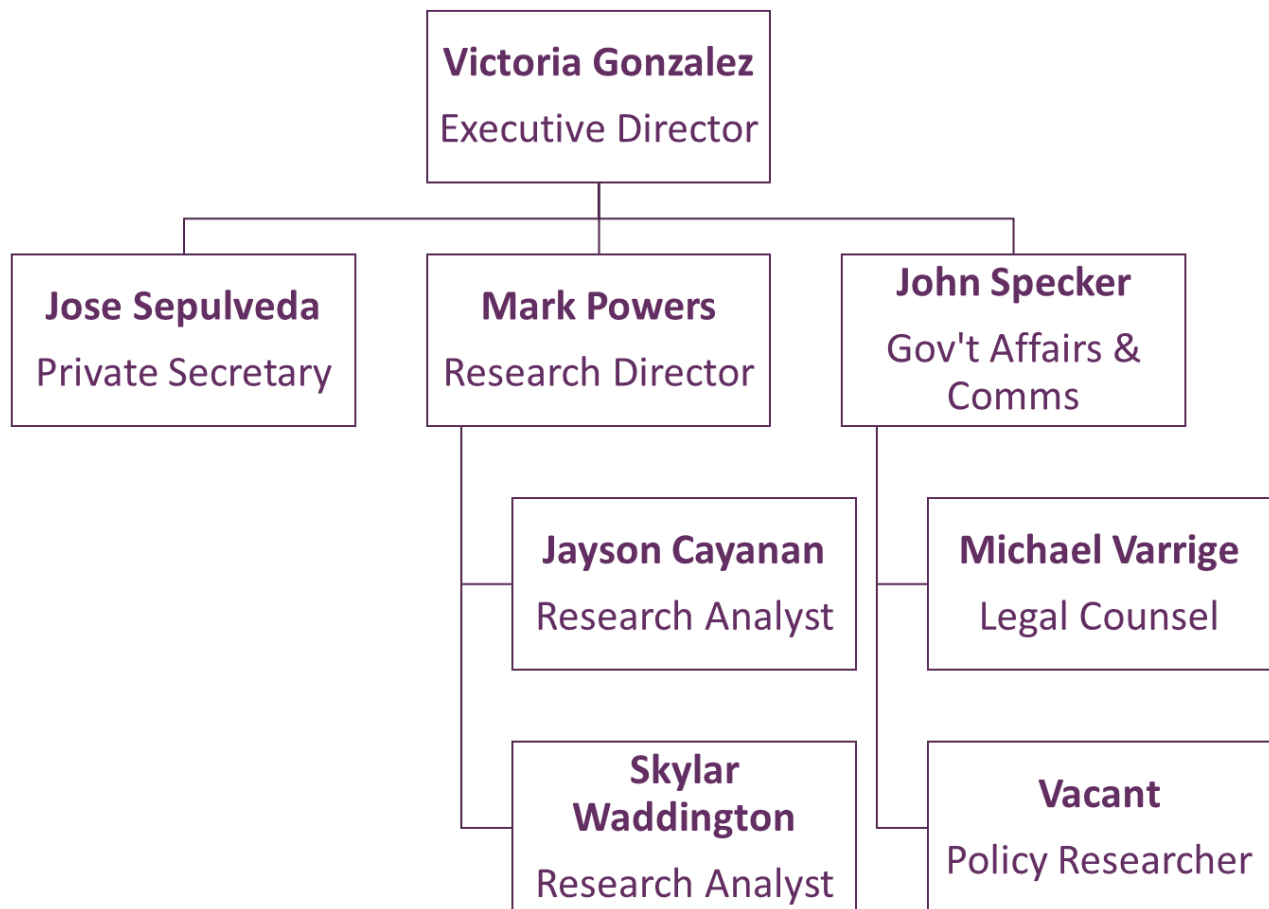
Objective – We provide data, research, and policy analysis that is non-partisan and does not align with or advance a political party or policy objective.



Staffing and Budget

In 2025, SPAC's staff included Executive Director Victoria Gonzalez, Research Director Mark Powers, Government Affairs and Communications Advisor John Specker, Legal Counsel Michael Varrige, Senior Policy Advisor Skylar Waddington, Senior Policy Advisor Jayson Cayanan, and Private Secretary Jose Sepulveda.

SPAC's budget for fiscal year 2025 was \$852,500. For fiscal year 2026, SPAC's budget increased to \$1,000,000.



What's New

In 2025, SPAC welcomed three new staff members, including two new researchers on the Research Team and one private secretary who reports directly to the Executive Director. SPAC also added two new members to the Council, Judge Steven Fruth who filled a vacant retired judge position and Elizabeth Leahy who became SPAC's new designee from the Illinois State Police.

SPAC expanded our impact analyses to provide more detailed analyses of the proposed legislation. These new features include a detailed bill analysis that provides a narrative of the changes that are proposed in the legislation and a policy impacts section that identifies notable policy outcomes of the legislative proposal. SPAC also expanded its 101 series. New publications in this series include Truth in Sentencing 101, Prison Release Pathways, Parole and Mandatory Supervised Release 101, Homicide 101, Firearm Crimes 101, and Affirmative Defenses 101.

SPAC made two presentations to the General Assembly in 2025. The first was a presentation to the House Judiciary-Criminal Committee during a subject matter hearing on Truth in Sentencing (TIS). SPAC provided data specific to TIS in Illinois and an analysis of legislative proposals that revised the sentence credits statute. The second presentation SPAC gave was to the Senate Criminal Law committee. This presentation was a SPAC 101 which informed committee members about SPAC and the resources that SPAC can provide them.

In August, SPAC hosted the National Association of Sentencing Commissions (NASC) annual conference in Madison, Wisconsin. SPAC staff provided support in the planning and daily operations of the conference. SPAC staff was also involved in four presentations throughout the two-day conference. The first involved partnering with the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission to discuss race/ethnicity in criminal justice data and how to implement methodology to accurately capture people who identify as Hispanic/Latino. Another presentation discussed new sentencing commissions and what is required to establish and maintain a sentencing commission. This presentation involved collaboration with different states including Nevada and Michigan.

The third presentation focused on aging dynamics in the prison system both Illinois and nationally. The final presentation was a support group for sentencing commissions which allowed for commission staff and members to meet and discuss issues facing their states along with possible solutions. This presentation allowed commissions from around the country to share their expertise and knowledge with each other.

SPAC visited several IDOC facilities in 2025 including Menard, Decatur, Lincoln, and Pontiac Correctional Centers.

SPAC is currently working with IDOC to make all SPAC publications available on the tablets that IDOC provides to all incarcerated people.

Looking ahead, SPAC adjusted the Council meeting dates for the 2026 year. Rather than have all the Council meetings in the last six months of the year, SPAC's meeting dates for next year are Tuesday, February 24th, Friday, July 10th, and Friday, October 23rd. The February meeting will be in Springfield to correspond with legislative session while the July and October meetings will take place in Chicago.

Meetings

In 2025, SPAC held Council meetings in July, September, and November.

July

During the July meeting, the Council voted to appoint a new councilmember to fill one of its two vacant retired judge positions. Judge Steven Fruth was unanimously selected to the Council to fill one of these vacancies.

The first presentation at the meeting was from the Policy Education team, which presented the documents that SPAC had published since the November 2024 meeting. These included most of SPAC's impact analyses for the 2025 Session of the 104th General Assembly. Additionally, the Policy Education team presented four documents from SPAC's 101 series including Sentence Credits 101, Truth in Sentencing 101, Controlled Substances 101, and Parole and Mandatory Supervised Release 101. The Policy Education team also presented the Public Acts Document from the 2024 session of the 103rd General Assembly.

Director Gonzalez and Mark Powers then presented on SPAC's race/ethnicity adjustment methodology. SPAC developed and implemented this methodology to adjust race for certain Hispanic/Latino people in the CHRI data. This presentation also included a history of how the US Census has evolved in collecting race and ethnicity information, how Illinois criminal justice entities have captured race and ethnicity information over time, and the current best practices for accurately capturing race and ethnicity data.

September

The September meeting consisted of a panel presentation that examined the aging dynamics of the prison system in Illinois and nationally. The panel included Director Gonzalez, Mark Powers, and Renagh O'Leary, Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School. John Specker moderated the panel.

The panel discussed how crime rates and admission rates have changed over time, noting a substantial decline among the youngest age groups. The panel also discussed how the IDOC population has shifted, with most individuals now being older and serving lengthy sentences for violent offenses. The panel also discussed how the aging population poses new challenges

that were previously not as pressing when the prison population did not have as many older incarcerated people.

November

For the November meeting, SPAC presented on drug trends in Illinois. Specifically, how the number of arrests, convictions, and sentences for controlled substance offenses have declined while the same metrics for methamphetamine have remained stable or increased. The presentation also highlighted different regional trends across Illinois.

Publications

SPAC generally has four publication types: impact analyses; annual publications; 101s; and detailed research reports on different aspects of the Illinois criminal justice system.

Impact Analyses:

SPAC published impact analyses of the following bills:

- SB290 – Class increases for a violation of order of protection
- HB74 – Requires that a prison sentence be imposed for a conviction that requires registration under the Sex Offender Registration Act
- HB3449 & SB2257 – Truth in Sentencing Stepdown
- HB3332 – Resentencing Under 21
- HB2764 – Earned Reentry
- HB2400 – Aggravated Criminal Sexual Assault and Predatory Criminal Sexual Assault
- HB2364 – Removal of Truth in Sentencing
- HB1241 – Mitigating Factors and Sentencing Under 21
- HB4082 – C-Number Parole

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

Research Reports:

SPAC published a research report titled Race and Ethnicity Adjustment Methodology. This document explains SPAC’s methodology to adjust race and ethnicity data of certain Hispanic/Latino people in CHRI records to allow for more accurate demographic analysis across arrests and sentencing outcomes. To view this document, click [here](#).

SPAC published ‘Public Acts 103rd General Assembly (2024 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:

- Truth in Sentencing 101

- Prison Release Pathways
- Parole and MSR 101
- Homicide 101
- Firearm Crimes 101
- Affirmative Defenses 101

To view those publications, click [here](#).

Enabling Statute

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.)