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Illinoisans Agree Judges Should Have More Choices With Veterans

An overwhelming majority of Illinois voters agree that judges should be allowed to make exceptions to mandatory minimum sentencing requirements for certain veterans who are convicted of crimes, according to the results of the latest poll from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Among the 1,000 Illinois registered voters surveyed, seven out of ten (69 percent) say they agree that judges should be allowed to make exceptions to minimum sentencing laws for veterans who are convicted of crimes but have service related disabilities. Only 22 percent of respondents disagree and 9 percent answered otherwise. Post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury were listed as examples of these disabilities.

The survey was conducted Sept. 27-Oct 2. It has a margin for error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

Political differences exist, but support is strong in each party. Democrats show the most support. Seven in ten (71 percent) Democrats agree that judges should be able to make these sentencing exceptions for certain veterans and only one in five (21 percent) disagree. Two-thirds (66 percent) of Republicans agree that judges should be able to make sentencing exceptions for certain veterans and one in four (24 percent) disagree. Among Independents, 67 percent agree and 20 percent disagree.

Differences by geography emerge, but clear majorities in each region of the state show strong support for the idea of judges having more sentencing discretion when it comes to veterans. In the Chicago suburbs (suburban Cook and the collar counties) 72 percent of respondents agree that judges should be allowed to make exceptions to minimum sentencing law for certain veterans and only 20 percent of respondents in the Chicago suburbs disagree. In Chicago, support is slightly lower than the suburbs with 68 percent of respondents in the city agreeing and 20 percent disagreeing. Support is at its lowest in the rural parts of the state where 63 percent agree with the statement and 26 percent disagree.

“Though mandatory minimum sentencing laws can serve a purpose, they can also unjustly tie judges’ hands,” said Delio Calzolari, associate director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute

and one of the designers of the poll. “The unique and varied issues faced by veterans returning from over a decade and a half of conflict overseas require courts to have more discretion and be more flexible to achieve justice for all parties involved.” Calzolari is a Navy veteran and attorney.

Support is statistically the same for military and nonmilitary households. The poll considers a military household one in which the respondent or any member of the respondent’s immediate family served in the military. Seven in ten (69 percent) of military household respondents and two-thirds (67 percent) of nonmilitary households agree that judges should be allowed to make exceptions to minimum sentencing law for certain veterans. One in five (21 percent) of military and one-quarter (24 percent) of nonmilitary households disagree.

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The margin of error for the entire sample of 1,000 voters is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the population proportion would be within plus or minus the reported margin for error for each subsample. For subsamples, the margin of error increases as the sample size goes down. The margin of error was not adjusted for design effects.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas using the random digit dialing method. The telephone sample was provided to Customer Research International by Scientific Telephone Samples. Potential interviewees were screened based on whether they were registered voters and quotas based on area code and sex (<60% female). Interviewers asked to speak to the youngest registered voter at home at the time of the call. Cell phone interviews accounted for 60 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available.

Field work was conducted from September 27-October 2. No auto-dial or “robo” polling is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. The data were not weighted in any way. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute’s polling web site, simonpoll.org.

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative. AAPOR works to encourage objective survey standards for practice and disclosure. Membership in the Transparency Initiative reflects a pledge to practice transparency in reporting survey-based findings.

Simon Institute polling data are also archived by four academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The four open source data repositories are: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (<http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/>), The University of Michigan’s Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://openicpsr.org>), the University of North Carolina’s Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

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