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### **Tougher Sentences Backed to Curb Gun Violence in Illinois**

CARBONDALE, Ill. – Registered voters in Illinois show strong support for two key provisions of a gun crime bill which is pending in the legislature, according to a recent statewide public opinion poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

\*Two-thirds (66.8 percent) said they favor increasing mandatory minimum prison sentences from two years to three years for felony convictions involving a firearm while only 22.5 percent opposed the idea. There were 10.7 percent undecided.

\*The poll also found 64.5 percent favored requiring convicted felons to serve at least 85 percent of their prison sentence while 25.2 percent favored no mandatory minimum. There were 10.2 percent undecided.

The poll of 1,006 registered voters was taken Sept. 23-Oct. 15 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Some background: House Bill 5672 seeks to enhance penalties for certain violations of laws concerning unlawful use or possession of weapons. It is sponsored by Democratic State Rep. Michael Zalewski of Riverside and calls for increased prison sentences for certain gun crimes from two years to three years.

The bill also requires at least 85 percent of certain gun-related-crime prison sentences to be served, a provision called “Truth in Sentencing” by bill supporters. Current law requires 50 percent of these sentences to be served.

Many local and statewide officials support these proposals as a way to curb violent crime in the state, particularly Chicago.

“Regardless of political affiliation or region of the state, these poll results show widespread public support for increasing to three years the mandatory minimum sentence for gun-involved felonies and Truth-in-Sentencing,” said Delio Calzolari, a lawyer and associate director of the Institute.

When broken out by region and political party, the poll found:

- Minimum Sentencing / Region. Support for increased minimum sentencing is over 60 percent throughout the state. In Chicago, 66.0 percent favor and 24.0 percent oppose with 10.0 percent undecided. Downstate shows the weakest support with 63.4 percent in favor, 22.1 percent opposed and 14.5 percent undecided. The strongest support comes from the Chicago Suburbs with 69.2 percent in favor, 22.1 percent opposed and 8.7 percent undecided.
- Minimum Sentencing / Political Party. Statewide, Republicans and Democrats show similar support in favor of bumping the minimum sentence from two to three years. 69.9 percent of Republicans favored the proposal as did 68.0 percent of Democrats. Republican opposition was 21.2 percent with 8.9 percent undecided. Democrat opposition was 23.2 percent with 8.8 percent undecided. Of those identifying themselves as Independent, 62.0 percent favored the proposal, 24.1 percent opposed and 13.9 percent were undecided.
- Truth-in-Sentencing/ Region. The greatest support for requiring felons to serve 85 percent of their prison sentence versus no mandatory minimum was Downstate, where 67.0 percent supported the 85 percent sentences and 21.5 percent chose no mandatory sentences. There were 11.6 percent undecided. The weakest support for Truth-in-Sentencing was in Chicago where 61.5 percent of respondents chose requiring felons to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences, 26.0 percent chose no mandatory minimum sentencing, and 12.5 percent were undecided. In the Chicago suburbs, 64.2 percent of respondents chose the 85 percent minimum sentence, 27.2 percent chose the option for no minimum sentencing, and 8.5 percent were undecided.
- Truth-in-Sentencing/ Political Party. Republicans favored this Truth in Sentencing proposal more than Democrats. Almost seven in ten Republicans (69.1 percent) chose the Truth in Sentencing proposal option as opposed to 65.3 percent of Democrats and 61.5 percent of Independents. Alternatively, 23.0 percent of Republicans, 24.7 percent of Democrats and 28.3 percent of Independents chose the option that minimum sentences should not be imposed on felons. Undecided Republicans, Democrats and Independents were 7.8 percent, 10.0 percent and 10.2 percent respectively.
- Combined Results/ Analysis Support softens when the policies are combined. Combined results show 51.5 percent of Illinoisans favor both the increased minimum sentencing and believe that convicted felons should serve at least 85% of prison sentences. Only 11.5 percent oppose both the sentencing increase and hold opinions closer to no minimum sentencing.

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Cross tabs for the referenced questions will be on the institute's website, [paulsimoninstitute.siu.edu](http://paulsimoninstitute.siu.edu).

*The Simon Institute Poll interviewed 1,006 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3 points from the results obtained here. The margin of error will be larger for demographic, geographic and response subgroups.*

*Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews accounted for 30 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Fieldwork was conducted from September 23 through October 15. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute's endowment fund.*

*Note: The "Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Poll," the "Simon Poll" and the "Southern Illinois Poll" are the copyrighted trademarks of the board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use and publication of these polls is encouraged- but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU Carbondale.*

Attachment 1

1. Some have proposed that the mandatory minimum sentence for those convicted of a felony involving a firearm should be increased from two years to three years. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

Strongly favor	36.8%
Favor	30.0%
Oppose	16.0%
Strongly oppose	6.5%
Other/Don't know	10.7%

2. Some have proposed a law requiring that convicted felons who have been found guilty of illegally carrying firearms would have to serve at least 85 percent of their sentence. Some people

a) support the law because they say it would make our laws more of a deterrent against violent gun crimes, and would take some of the most dangerous people off the streets

and some people

b) oppose the law because they say it would cost too much to house more people in already overcrowded prisons, and they worry that some law-abiding people might be imprisoned by this stricter law.

Which comes closer to your opinion, that

Convicted felons should serve at least 85 percent of their gun crime sentences	64.5%
We should not impose mandatory minimum sentences on felons convicted of gun crimes	25.2%
Other/Don't know	10.2%

3. Cross Tabulation

Some have proposed that the mandatory minimum sentence for those convicted of a felony involving a firearm should be increased from two years to three years. Would you favor or oppose this proposal?

	Favor	Oppose	Other/Don't know
Convicted felons should serve at least 85 percent of their gun-crime sentences	51.5%	9.1%	3.9%
We should not impose mandatory minimum sentences on felons convicted of gun crimes	11.3%	11.5%	2.4%
Other/ Don't Know	4.0%	1.8%	4.5%