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June 13, 2020

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The Honorable Mike Parson
Office of the Governor
Room 216
Missouri State Capitol
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Governor Parson:

I am writing on behalf of women's voices Raised for social Justice. We are a grassroots organization in the St. Louis region with 500 members. We are urging you to veto Senate Bill 600.

This tough on crime bill disproportionately hurts people and communities of color. Decades of rigorous studies show that the mandatory minimums and stacking of sentences in Senate Bill 600 will not deter crime or reduce violence.

The Office of the State Public Defender warns they cannot provide effective representation to additional indigent persons with existing staff. This means people without adequate resources will not have proper representation.

In Missouri, Black people constituted 12% of state residents, but 39% of people in jail and 34% of people in prison. One in five Black people born in 2001 is likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime compared to one in 29 White people. The structural racism in our criminal justice system is destroying lives, families, and communities.

By instituting new mandatory minimums, Missouri is telling the accused that the deck is stacked against you, take a plea deal, or risk a minimum of 3-5 years of your life in prison. Everyone deserves their day in court. They do not deserve to be pressured to give up before they even get to court. Nationally, 95 percent of cases end in plea deals.

In this time of heightened awareness of white privilege and institutional racism, your veto of this bill will be especially significant. Your signing it will be equally significant.

I would also like to raise an issue of concern about your staff's handling of phone calls. When a Women's Voices member called recently, she asked about the number of calls received regarding SB 600. She was told by the individual who answered the phone that they were not keeping track of the number of calls. This is completely unacceptable. I respectfully ask that you send a response to us confirming if this is, in fact, the policy of your staff.

Thanks for your consideration of our position on SB600 and our concern about your staff's lack of seriousness regarding communications from Missourians with you. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Ruth Ehresman
Co-President, Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice
7401 Delmar St. Louis, MO 63130
314.504.3616