
2026 National Association of Sentencing Commissions Annual Conference Themes

Connecticut Sentencing Commission

September 9, 2026

2026 NASC Conference

- Albuquerque, New Mexico
- August 12-14
- CT Delegation: Rich Sparaco (IMRP), Dr. Lydia Wileden (IMRP), Tommy Dowd (IMRP), Jordan Oquendo (IMRP), John DelBarba (OCPD)



Themes

- Strengthening the role of sentencing commissions
- Building a data-driven sentencing system
- Defining the goals of sentencing and balancing competing priorities
- Looking beyond the sentence to real-world outcomes

Strengthening the Role of Sentencing Commissions

- Commissions should be permanent, adequately funded, and institutionally robust, rather than temporary bodies that disappear after completing a project
- Clear organizational roles, strong relationships with commissioners, and institutional knowledge are essential
- Commissions can serve as a trusted, nonpartisan resource for legislators by providing timely analysis and data
- Presentation from the New Mexico Sentencing Commission illustrated the benefits of a strong commission; presentation from individuals seeking to revive the Michigan Sentencing Commission highlighted the risks when commissions lack permanence and adequate resources

Building a Data-Driven Sentencing System

- Data should inform policy development, implementation, and evaluation, not simply be used after the fact
- Bills and policies should be designed with measurable goals and data markers from the outset
- The conference highlighted the need for better data integration, research capacity, and analysis of sentencing outcomes, criminal history, guideline compliance, and recidivism
- A recurring question was: “Do we have the data to answer the question we are being asked?”

Defining the Goals of Sentencing and Balancing Competing Priorities

- **Define the goal first:** Prior to policy development, clearly identify the problem, intended outcome, and purpose—including public safety, deterrence, accountability, rehabilitation, or equity
- **Recognize competing priorities:** Different stakeholders may define fairness, success, and public safety differently, creating tradeoffs that should be explicitly considered
- **Test assumptions with evidence:** Commissions can examine both the empirical evidence and philosophical assumptions behind sentencing policies, including whether approaches truly reduce future harm
- **Focus on outcomes, not just severity:** Move the conversation from whether a policy is tough enough to whether it is fair, evidence-based, effective, and achieving its intended goals

Looking Beyond the Sentence to Real-World Outcomes

- A major theme was that sentencing policy does not end when a sentence is imposed
- The conference examined what happens before, during, and after sentencing – including record clearing, legal financial obligations, prison education, reentry policies, post-release supervision, and employment
- Implementation can determine whether a policy achieves its intended goals
- The education session captured this particularly well: sentencing answers “how long?”, but policymakers also need to ask, “what happens?”

What These Themes Suggest for CT

- Strengthen the Commission's role as a source of nonpartisan analysis and consensus creation
- Identify major sentencing questions where CT lacks sufficient data or consistent measures
- Build evaluation into policy development: define goals and data markers before implementation
- Success cannot be solely defined by enacting statutory language, but also by examining the results of implementation (i.e., outcomes, reentry pathways, recidivism, etc.)
- Leverage the Commission's unique position to bring legislators, courts, prosecutors, defense, corrections, researchers, service providers, and affected communities into the same policy conversation
- Develop a consistent framework for asking whether sentencing policies improve public safety, fairness, accountability, and long-term outcomes

Main Takeaway & Where CT Stands

- The conference's central message was that sentencing commissions need to “level up” from simply developing or analyzing sentencing policy to becoming stronger, more influential institutions that help the entire justice system define its goals, improve data access and analysis, understand implementation, and evaluate outcomes, with an eye towards continuous improvement.
- Key Questions:
 - Where can we “level up” our data and research capacity?
 - What policies lack defined goals or measurable outcomes?
 - What barriers are undermining sound policy that could be implemented?
 - What information would make us more useful to decision-makers while preserving our independent role?
 - How can we better connect our decisions to reentry, education, and long-term public safety?

Questions?
