

Information Technology

Legal tech company creates free mandatory minimum sentence monitoring website

By **Amanda Jerome**

(September 15, 2017, 8:42 AM EDT) -- Mandatory Minimum Penalties (MMPs) have been at the forefront of debate over the past year with the Department of Justice publishing a report on the subject by Kyle Coady and Kari Glynnes Elliott in 2016 and Statistics Canada releasing an analysis of MMP outcomes for selected offences last month.

One legal tech company saw this an opportunity to provide a look at all the data it had collected on mandatory minimum sentencing in Canada. The website it created, called MMS.watch, gives legal professionals a chance to check which mandatory minimum sentences have been challenged or struck down as unconstitutional.



Matthew Oleynik

"Mandatory minimum sentences have recently become one of the most controversial elements of Canadian criminal justice. They certainly have a profound effect on people charged with criminal offences, but we felt the public debate was going on in the abstract and thought it was important to get the numbers out there," said Matthew Oleynik, founder of rangefindr.ca, the company that developed MMS.watch.

Oleynik said that before his company created MMS.watch there was no central place for lawyers or judges to check on the constitutionality of a mandatory minimum sentence.

"There's been a lot of talk about whether the current federal government should roll back mandatory minimum sentences. But no one seemed to be discussing the fact that half the minimums that have been challenged have already been found to constitute cruel and unusual punishment," he said.

Rangefindr.ca runs a sentencing database, so it already maintained an internal list of which mandatory minimum sentences were being challenged and which have been struck down. Oleynik said it was just a matter of externalizing that data in a way that was accessible to the public.

MMS.watch is a free tool and will remain that way, according to its website.

"We see this project as contributing to an important public discussion," said Oleynik explaining his

decision not to charge for access to the site.

"We already had this data, so we didn't have to collect or organize them from scratch. And the debate about the place of mandatory minimum sentences is critical to the future direction of Canadian criminal justice," he added.

MMS.watch is an ongoing project by rangefindr.ca, so it will grow and change over time.

According to the company's research, of the 58 mandatory minimum sentences for sexual offences nine have been challenged and upheld, while eight have been completely struck down by the courts. This compares to the 33 mandatory minimum sentences for drug offences, which have had four sentences challenged and upheld and 10 have struck down by the court.