• Reducing Missouri’s prison population and providing appropriate community-level supervision and treatment: Approximately 7,500 people who are in Missouri prisons due to nonviolent or drug offenses are parents to minor children. Mothers are more likely to complete substance use treatment programs if they remain with their children.

• Reducing recidivism for parents and the risk that their children will be incarcerated when they are older: An early study of Washington state’s Parenting Sentencing Alternative found that participants in the program were 71% less likely to be convicted of a new felony in the two years after their release. Children of parents who have ever been incarcerated are more likely to have spent time in jail and to have a felony charge as adults.

• Saving the state money:
  — In the U.S., the estimated cost per year to treat health problems linked to a family member’s incarceration is $346 million for minor children and $22.5 billion for adult children.
  — Parental incarceration costs the state an average of $21,480 per inmate annually. Foster care costs the state more than $10,000 per child annually.

• Reducing the number of children in foster care: As of 2015, 10% of foster care children in Missouri (approximately 1,200 children) had entered foster care due to parental incarceration.

• Reducing childhood poverty: Prior to their arrests, more than half of mothers and fathers in state prisons were their children’s main financial support. Parental incarceration puts young children at an increased risk of food insecurity and homelessness.

• Improving children’s physical, behavioral, and mental/emotional health:
  — Children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk for mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and clinical depression, as well as greater risk for drug abuse, behavioral problems, and delinquency. Individuals who have experienced parental incarceration are on average 2.5 times more likely than children whose parents have not been incarcerated to attempt suicide at some point.
  — Children whose parents have been incarcerated are more likely to repeat grades and less likely to graduate high school and develop the social and attention skills they need in school.
  — Parental incarceration is correlated with asthma, migraines, high cholesterol, and an increased likelihood of cancer and heart attacks later in life.

To learn how you can help, visit missouriappleseed.org or email Liza Weiss at lweiss@missouriappleseed.org.