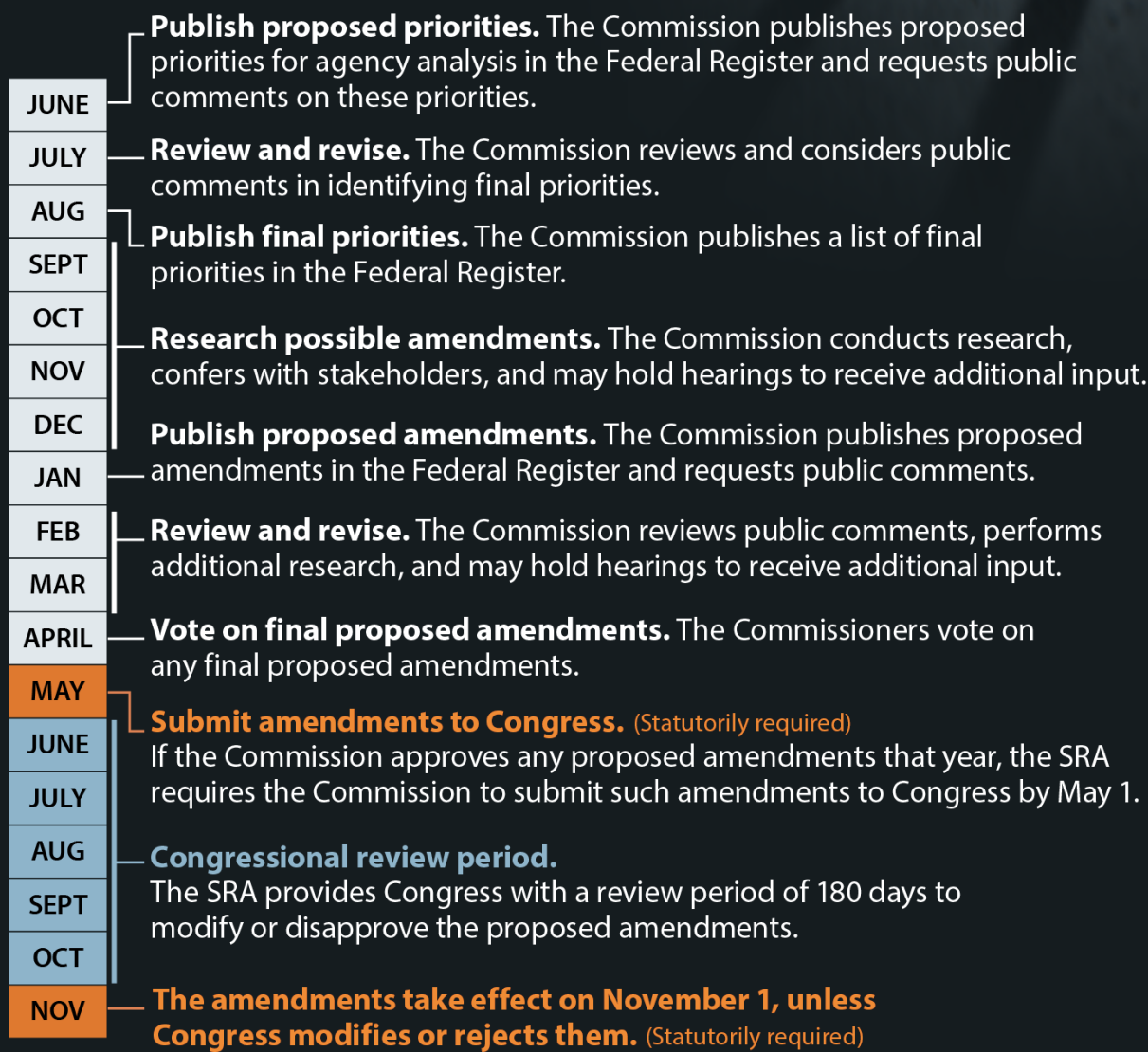


Amending the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines

In 1984, Congress enacted the Sentencing Reform Act (SRA), P.L. 98-473. The SRA established the U.S. Sentencing Commission and directed this new agency to promulgate the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines. These guidelines serve as the starting point for every federal criminal sentence imposed across the country. In the SRA, Congress instructed the Commission to “periodically . . . review and revise” the guidelines in light of additional data, cases, and congressional directives. Any such revisions must follow a statutorily prescribed amendments process.



The Amendments Process

The SRA specifies **two statutory dates** in the amendments process. The Commission has developed an internal schedule around these two dates.



Congressional Rejection of Proposed Amendments

From 1987 to 2024, the Commission has proposed over 800 amendments to the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines. Of these, Congress has rejected two proposed amendments, both proposed during the 1995 amendments cycle.

-  In 1995, the Commission voted 4-3 to adopt a **1:1 ratio of the quantities of powder and crack cocaine** needed to trigger certain mandatory minimum penalties.
-  In the same amendments cycle, the Commission voted to revise the guidelines applicable to **money laundering offenses**.

A bill rejecting both of these proposed amendments passed in the Senate, and then in the House, and was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 30, 1995, as P.L. 104-38.

Sources: Based on 28 U.S.C. § 994(o)-(p) and CRS Report R41696, *How the Federal Sentencing Guidelines Work: An Overview*.

Information as of April 28, 2025. Prepared by Dave S. Sidhu, Legislative Attorney, and Amber Wilhelm, Visual Information Specialist. For more information, see CRS In Focus Report IF12422, *Congressional Review of Proposed Amendments to the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines*, by Dave S. Sidhu.

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