



A Snapshot of Missouri Regulation in 2017

113,112 Restrictions, 7.5 Million Words, and 10 Weeks to Read

by James Broughel, Oliver Sherouse, and Daniel Francis

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It would take an ordinary person more than three years to read the entire *US Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR), which contained more than 112 million words in 2017.¹ The sheer size of the CFR poses a problem not just for the individuals and businesses that want to stay in compliance with the law, but also for anyone interested in understanding the consequences of this massive system of rules. States also have sizable regulatory codes, which add an additional layer to the enormous body of federal regulation. A prime example is the 2017 Missouri regulatory code, known as the *Missouri Code of State Regulations* (CSR).²

A tool known as State RegData³—a platform for analyzing and quantifying state regulatory text—was developed by researchers at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. State RegData in minutes captures information that an ordinary person would take hours, weeks, or even years to obtain. For example, the tool allows researchers to identify the industries most targeted by regulation by connecting keywords relevant to those industries with counts of words known as regulatory restrictions. These are words and phrases like “shall,” “must,” “may not,” “prohibited,” and “required” that can signify legal constraints and obligations.⁴ As shown in figure 1, the three industries with the highest estimates of industry-relevant restrictions in the 2017 Missouri CSR are utilities, ambulatory healthcare services, and chemical manufacturing.

State RegData also reveals that the Missouri CSR contains 113,112 restrictions and more than 7.5 million words. It would take an individual 418 hours—or more than 10 weeks—to read the entire CSR. That’s assuming the reader spends 40 hours per week reading and reads at a rate

1. “The QuantGov Regulatory Clock,” QuantGov, accessed July 7, 2017.

2. *Missouri Code of State Regulations*, accessed July 4, 2017.

3. State RegData forms a part of a broader project called QuantGov, which seeks to quantify legal text. See Patrick A. McLaughlin and Oliver Sherouse, “QuantGov—A Policy Analytics Platform,” QuantGov, October 31, 2016.

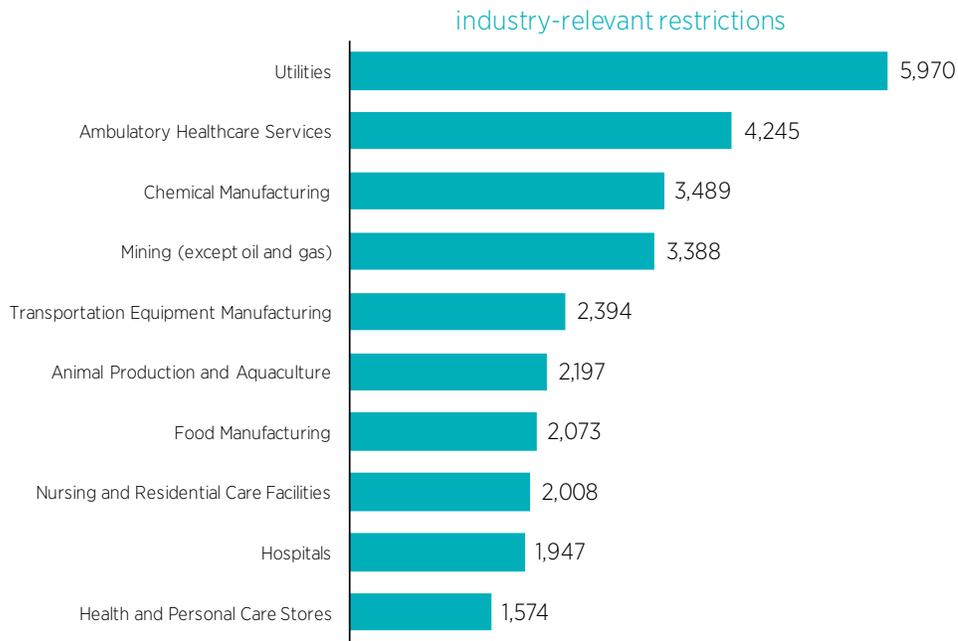
4. Restrictions can also occur in legal text for other purposes, such as for definitional purposes. Furthermore, restrictions may at times relate to government employees rather than the public.

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of 300 words per minute. For comparison, in 2017 there were more than 1.15 million additional restrictions in the federal code.⁵ Individuals and businesses in Missouri must navigate all these restrictions to remain in compliance.

Figure 1. The Top 10 Industries Targeted by Missouri State Regulation in 2017



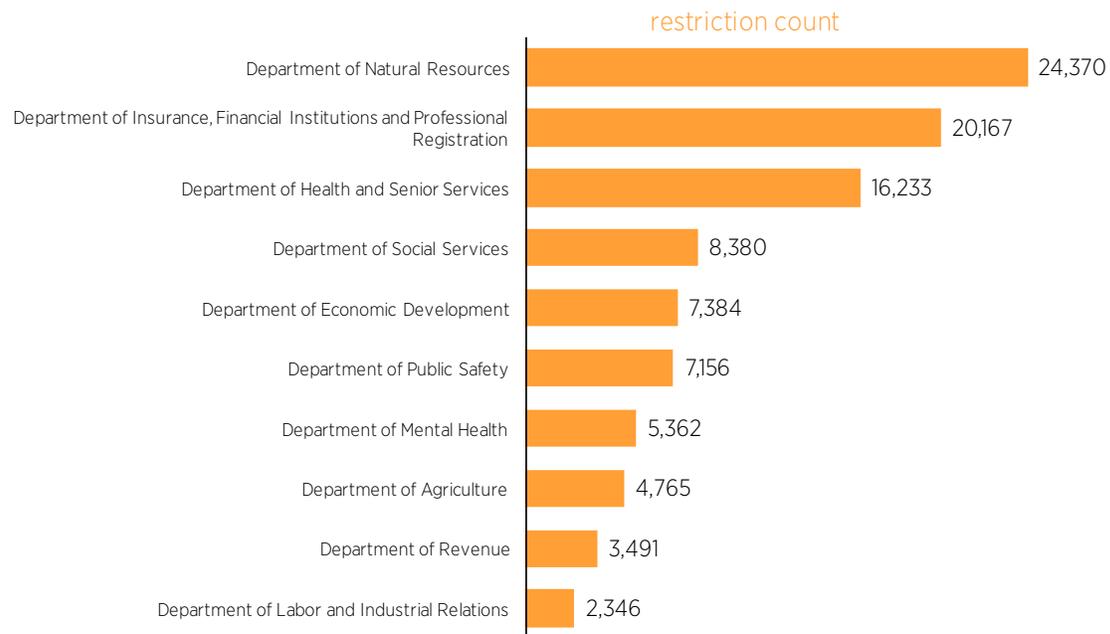
Source: "State Administrative Codes—Missouri," <http://quantgov.org/data/>.

The titles of the CSR are organized based on the regulatory department that writes the rules housed within those titles. Figure 2 shows that in 2017, rules from the Department of Natural Resources, which are found in title 10, contained more than 24,000 restrictions. By this measure, the Department of Natural Resources is the biggest regulator in Missouri. Coming in second is the Department of Insurance, Financial Institutions and Professional Registration, whose rules can be found in title 20. This title contains more than 20,000 restrictions.

Federal regulation tends to attract the most headlines, but it is important to remember that the more than 112 million words and 1.15 million restrictions in the federal code are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the true scope of regulation in the United States. States like Missouri write millions of additional words of regulation and hundreds of thousands of additional restrictions. State-level requirements carry the force of law to restrict individuals and businesses just as federal ones do.

5. "The QuantGov Regulatory Clock," QuantGov.

Figure 2. The Top 10 Regulators in Missouri in 2017



Source: "State Administrative Codes—Missouri," <http://quantgov.org/data/>.

Researchers are only beginning to understand the consequences of the massive and growing federal regulatory system on economic growth and well-being in the United States.⁶ Meanwhile, the effects of state regulation remain largely unknown. If this snapshot of Missouri regulation in 2017 is a good indicator, then the states are also active regulators, suggesting the true impact of regulation on society is far greater than that of federal regulation alone.

6. See, for example, Bentley Coffey, Patrick A. McLaughlin, and Pietro Peretto, "The Cumulative Cost of Regulations" (Mercatus Working Paper, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, 2016).

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