

NEWS RELEASE

R. Andrew Murray
District Attorney

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DA Murray applauds Mecklenburg's treatment courts during 20th anniversary

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – As Mecklenburg County's first drug treatment court celebrates its 20th anniversary this month, District Attorney Andrew Murray is pledging his continued support of the county's treatment court programs, which provide critical services to those facing addictions. Treatment courts have proven to help protect the community from future criminal activity and save significant court time and resources.

In February 1995, the program now known as District Court Supervision, Treatment, Education and Prevention (STEP) Drug Treatment Court began in Mecklenburg County. Since then, the programs have expanded to address substance abuse and other issues. Currently, the following six treatment court programs operate in Mecklenburg County: District Court STEP, Driving While Impaired STEP Court, Superior Court STEP, Mental Health Court, Family Court and Youth Treatment Court.



Criminal drug treatment court programs are aimed at those grappling with drug or alcohol addictions and who are accused or convicted of non-violent criminal offenses. These courts hold defendants accountable for their actions and ensure the public's safety while also connecting defendants with the treatment and counseling services necessary to combat addictions. Participants are subject to random drug screenings. They also complete intensive outpatient treatment, and they regularly meet with a case manager. Due to budget constraints, the state legislature cut funding to treatment court programs in 2011. That's when Mecklenburg County, which recognized the successes of such programs, assumed the funding of the county's treatment courts.

“Putting an end to the cycle of drug and alcohol abuse is a crucial step in stemming future crime,” says District Attorney Murray. “Drug users aren't simply harming themselves. Drug use is the first step in a dangerous path of crime, often leading to thefts and even homicides. Mecklenburg County's gracious support of these programs is an investment not only in people's lives but also in the overall safety of our community.”

An evaluation of drug treatment courts in North Carolina found that graduates of these programs are rearrested at half the rate of non-graduates. In Mecklenburg County, the recidivism rate among participants was only 11 percent.

“We believe the cognitive-behavioral approach offered by treatment courts, combined with intensive supervision, provides the necessary support structure to assist individuals in learning new ways to cope with the ups and downs of life,” says Janeanne Gonzales, program

administrator of the Mecklenburg County STEP program. “This offers the basic skills necessary to overcome their addiction and their involvement with the criminal justice system.”

In District Court, eligible participants who are charged with drug offenses and successfully complete the program may have the charges dismissed, allowing them an opportunity to become drug-free, productive and working members of the community. In Superior Court, defendants charged with felonies related to drug use are referred to the program after their convictions. Then, they are ordered by a judge to participate in treatment courts, allowing the courts to supervise their progress and compliance with court-ordered treatment plans.

Driving While Impaired STEP Court is for those convicted of high-level DWI offenses and then ordered by the sentencing judge to complete the program. The Youth Treatment Court program, which works with juveniles accused of criminal activity, addresses adolescent substance abuse and mental health issues by offering participants access to treatment services and increased monitoring for those on supervised probation.

For more information about Mecklenburg County’s treatment courts, [click here](#). Media interested in an interview can contact Meghan Cooke (meghan.a.cooke@nccourts.org) and Janeanne Gonzales (Janeanne.Gonzales@MecklenburgCountyNC.gov).

Note: For more information about the District Attorney’s Office, visit www.charmeckda.com. For updates and other information, “like” the DA’s Office on Facebook at www.facebook.com/charmeckda and follow us on Twitter: @CharMeckDA.

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