

NEWS RELEASE

Spencer B. Merriweather III
District Attorney

March 13, 2020

District Attorney announces response to COVID-19

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – As North Carolina and Mecklenburg County take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus), District Attorney Spencer B. Merriweather III today announces new measures that are being enacted to protect the public and employees of his office.

Earlier today, [N.C. Chief Justice Cheri Beasley announced](#) several directives affecting the operations of courts across the state. Beginning on Monday, March 16, 2020, most District and Superior Court hearings scheduled within the following 30 days will be postponed, meaning that those court dates will not be held any sooner than April 16, 2020. In Mecklenburg County, DA Merriweather joined local court officials in the planning of court operations during this unprecedented event. Together, they developed a modified court schedule that will significantly reduce the number of defendants, victims, attorneys and staff entering the courthouse during the coming weeks. DA Merriweather also informed his staff today that, unless their services are necessary for essential hearings and immediate office functions, they will be teleworking from home for at least two weeks.

“Members of my office have signed on to do work that is critically important to a safe and vibrant community,” says DA Merriweather. “The administration of justice and due process are what keep us from operating in a fog of chaos. Despite the widespread concern that surrounds us, we know that victims, witnesses and the public depend on us to secure justice. As this challenge grows more complex in the coming days and weeks, my office and I are committed to not only doing everything we can to protect the public from this pandemic but also keep the work of justice moving through our courts.”

Mecklenburg County court operations

While most District and Superior Court proceedings will be postponed, it is necessary to preserve the right to due process of law. Critical criminal proceedings – such as first appearances, some bond hearings, probable cause hearings and probation hearings – will be held in Mecklenburg County. [Click here for details from the Trial Court Administrator's Office about Mecklenburg County court proceedings during this affected period.](#) By order of Chief Justice Beasley, any person who has likely been exposed to COVID-19 should not enter any courthouse. Someone who has been exposed and has business with the court shall contact the Clerk of Superior Court's Office and inform court personnel of the situation and receive further instruction. Jurors or anyone who has been summoned to jury duty in the coming month should [contact the Jury Management Office](#) for more information. Defendants who have questions about their cases should direct questions to their attorneys or the Clerk of Court's Office.

Important information for victims

It is important for crime victims to know that this office's commitment to their safety and wellbeing continues despite any court closures. Some court hearings, such as bond or detention hearings, will be held during this period of limited court operation. If there are considerations of bond during hearings in which the Victim Rights Act obligations apply, attempts will be made to contact victims before those emergency hearings. In civil court, requests for restraining orders and domestic violence protective orders will continue to be heard. If you are the victim in a case scheduled for court in the next 30 days and you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the District Attorney's Office at 704-686-0700. This phone line will remain operational.

Internal DA's Office operations

Effective Monday, March 16, 2020, the District Attorney's Office will not be open to the public. N.C. Governor Roy Cooper and Chief Justice Beasley have both asked employers to allow staff to telework from home wherever possible to reduce the spread of infection. Following these recommendations, DA Merriweather has instructed the majority of his staff to begin teleworking Monday. A limited number of supervisors, prosecutors and support staff will report to the office to conduct necessary court sessions and the essential tasks that cannot be completed remotely. The District Attorney's Office phone line will remain operational to address any questions from victims or the public. DA Merriweather has instructed the office to operate under these procedures through March 27, 2020. At that point, the office will evaluate the ongoing risk and needs of the courts to determine how to proceed.

For updates, the District Attorney's Office encourages the public to follow the office on social media (@charmeckda on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram).

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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