

# NEWS RELEASE

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District Attorney

**October 23, 2018**

## **Drug traffickers convicted; 26 others referred to treatment programs**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – During the week of October 8, 2018, the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Drug Team convicted 45 defendants, including a heroin trafficker whose arrest resulted in the seizure of more than 5 kilograms of heroin. The defendants entered their guilty pleas in courtroom 5310 before The Honorable W. Todd Pomeroy, Superior Court Judge. The convictions were for crimes that included possessing, selling and trafficking in illegal drugs. Based on the structured sentencing laws in North Carolina, sentences ranged from probation to active prison sentences.

While the team works to hold drug sellers and traffickers accountable for their crimes, prosecutors also connect defendants facing addictions with treatment services. Since September 14, 2018, a total of 26 defendants have been referred to Mecklenburg County Recovery Courts, and 11 defendants have enrolled. There were 10 referrals to District STEP Recovery Court. Eight referrals were made to Superior STEP Recovery Court. Four referrals were made to Wellness Court (formerly Mental Health Treatment Court), and four defendants were referred to DWI Recovery Court. Additionally, one participant successfully graduated from Wellness Court in September 2018.

Among the defendants who pled guilty and were sent to prison were:

Francisco Hernandez-Alonso, 24, pled guilty to 1) trafficking in heroin by possession and 2) attempted trafficking in heroin by transportation. Hernandez-Alonso was sentenced to 103-145 months in prison. In August 2017, detectives with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, the Pineville Police Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives arranged to purchase a large amount of heroin from Hernandez-Alonso. After making contact with Hernandez-Alonso, undercover detectives had the heroin delivered to a site that was under surveillance. Hernandez-Alonso and two codefendants arrived at the pre-arranged location with the drugs, and all three were arrested. These arrests led to the seizure of more than 5 kilograms of heroin.

Little Gause, 39, pled guilty to trafficking in heroin by possession. Gause was sentenced to 70-93 months in prison. In April 2018, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police came into contact with Gause when investigating a traffic accident. Upon further inspection, officers determined Gause was in possession of illegal drugs. Officers located more than 14 grams of heroin and \$961 in cash.

Phon Ketbolom, 37, pled guilty to trafficking in methamphetamine by sale. Ketbolom was sentenced to 70-93 months in prison. In November 2017, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police

conducted an undercover purchase of narcotics from Ketbolom. As a result of the investigation, detectives seized more than 53 grams of methamphetamine.

Kemmel Escalante, 23, pled guilty to trafficking in cocaine by sale. Escalante was sentenced to 35-51 months in prison.

Shayla Taylor, 29, pled guilty to sale of cocaine. Taylor was sentenced to 15-27 months in prison.

*Note: Almost all guilty pleas entered in criminal administrative court are the result of an agreed upon plea arrangement between the State and the defendant, which is then approved by the sentencing judge. For more information about why most cases must be resolved by plea negotiation instead of jury trial, please visit the "Understanding Criminal Court" section of the DA's website at [www.charmeckda.com](http://www.charmeckda.com).*

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