

NEWS RELEASE

R. Andrew Murray
District Attorney

November 19, 2012

Citizens Court launched today

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – As part of an effort to more efficiently prosecute and resolve Mecklenburg County's high volume of court cases, a new Citizens Court began November 19, 2012 to handle privately-initiated cases.

Citizens Court is the result of a collaboration between the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office and Mecklenburg County District Court judges. A courtroom will be set aside every other Monday to offer mediation in privately-initiated cases, which are cases in which a citizen goes to a magistrate and files misdemeanor charges against another person.

Previously, such cases were heard in regular courtrooms and took a significant amount of time to examine. Now, Assistant District Attorneys will identify privately-initiated cases and refer them to Citizens Court. There are 30 cases scheduled for the Citizens Court's first day on November 19, 2012.

"An innovative Citizens Court will allow this Office and the Courts to address privately-initiated cases in a much smarter and effective way, which is a win-win for the judicial system and the citizens of Mecklenburg County," says District Attorney Andrew Murray.

Assistant District Attorney Bruce Lillie, who heads the District Attorney's Office's Misdemeanor Team, says that many privately-initiated cases involve family members and neighbors who have underlying issues that precede privately-initiated action.

"By addressing the root problems, we will do away with future cases that revolve around the same subject," Lillie says.

Citizens Court aims to save future court time by resolving issues between individuals, as well as by giving Assistant District Attorneys more time to focus on DWIs, serious assaults and repeat criminal offenders.

In Citizens Court, both victims and defendants will come to Mecklenburg County courtroom 4330 on the scheduled day. A judge and an Assistant District Attorney will explain the purpose of Citizens Court and – with the help of mediators provided by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Dispute Settlement Program – they will determine whether each case is appropriate for mediation. Then, mediators will attempt to find a resolution between both parties or schedule a mediating session for a later time.

Citizens Court will not hear serious or violent misdemeanors, such as domestic violence cases, sexual battery or incidents that involve serious injuries or victims who are children.

Citizens Court will be held every other Monday in courtroom 4330.

Learn more about the District Attorney's Office at www.charmeckda.com. Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/charmeckda and follow us on Twitter: @CharMeckDA.

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