

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Juries convict 2 defendants of drug offenses; 2 others plead guilty

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – The Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Drug Team tried two defendants during the week of January 30, 2017. Another two defendants entered guilty pleas. The proceedings were held before The Honorable Hugh B. Lewis and The Honorable Jesse B. Caldwell, III, Superior Court Judges.

Duane Austin, 24, was tried for 1) felony possession of marijuana and 2) possession of marijuana drug paraphernalia. The jury found Austin *guilty* of felony possession of marijuana and *not guilty* of possession of marijuana drug paraphernalia. Judge Caldwell sentenced Austin to 6-17 months in prison; that sentence was suspended pending his successful completion of 30 months of supervised probation. As one of the conditions of his probation, Austin must serve 7 days in the Mecklenburg County Jail.

Chicory Ruffin, 36, was tried for 1) possession of cocaine and 2) misdemeanor possession of marijuana. The jury found Ruffin *guilty* of misdemeanor possession of marijuana and *not guilty* of possession of cocaine. Judge Lewis sentenced Ruffin to 15 days in the Mecklenburg County Jail; that sentence was suspended pending her successful completion of 12 months of unsupervised probation.

Ryan Baghalzadeh, 29, filed a motion to suppress evidence seized or obtained by law enforcement, alleging violations of his legal rights. Judge Lewis, who heard arguments from the defense and an Assistant District Attorney, denied Baghalzadeh's motion and ruled that the evidence was admissible. Baghalzadeh then pled guilty as charged to 1) trafficking in marijuana by possession, 2) possession of marijuana with the intent to sell or deliver, 3) maintaining a vehicle for the purposes of keeping marijuana and 4) possession of marijuana drug paraphernalia. Judge Lewis sentenced Baghalzadeh to 25-39 months in prison. Federal agents learned that Baghalzadeh was connected to a nationwide drug trafficking conspiracy and relayed this information to Baghalzadeh's probation officers, who scheduled a meeting with Baghalzadeh to conduct a search of his residence and vehicle pursuant to his probation conditions. Minutes before the meeting, agents observed Baghalzadeh park his car at a gas station and receive a ride back to his home in another car. Probation officers made contact with Baghalzadeh and searched his home and the car he had parked at the gas station. Inside of the car, officers located 11.09 pounds of marijuana.

Chinelo Ray, 36, pled guilty to 1) trafficking in heroin by possession, 2) selling heroin and 3) possession with the intent to sell or deliver heroin. Judge Lewis sentenced Ray to 70-93 months in prison.

*Note: For more information about the District Attorney's Office, visit [www.charmeckda.com](http://www.charmeckda.com). For updates and other information, "like" the DA's Office on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/charmeckda](http://www.facebook.com/charmeckda) and follow us on Twitter: @CharMeckDA.*

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