

NEWS RELEASE

Spencer B. Merriweather III
District Attorney

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District Attorney's Office works to safely expand operations

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – As the courts begin to gradually expand operations this week, the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office is also taking steps to safely reopen the office while protecting staff, victims, defendants and the entire community.

Since the courts enacted closures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in mid-March, District Attorney's Office employees have been largely working from home, reviewing cases at dining room tables converted to work stations, connecting with victims over the phone and virtually meeting with colleagues to discuss cases. During this time, our staff have also remained committed to carrying on essential tasks that could not be completed remotely. A limited number of prosecutors and support staff have reported to duty to prepare for and conduct necessary court proceedings. Now, the office has begun to increase the number of employees present in the District Attorney's Office to prepare for expanded court proceedings.

"A safe and incremental expansion of our operations – guided by the best scientific and medical expertise locally available – is essential," says District Attorney Spencer B. Merriweather III. "However gradually court proceedings resume, my office must work to increase our functionality because we play a critical role in restoring public faith in the justice system and providing peace of mind to people who rely upon our service."

District Attorney Merriweather has been in regular communication with Mecklenburg County Public Health Director Gibbie Harris to discuss recommended precautions. The District Attorney's plans will rely on medical guidance to provide safe and healthy conditions in which his staff will continue the work of justice on behalf of the community.

Public access to the District Attorney's Office

The District Attorney's Office will remain closed to the public until at least July 6, 2020, but beginning this week, our staff may schedule in-person meetings with victims and families, as well as pre-trial readiness conferences with defense attorneys, by appointment only. All visitors will be instructed to wear a face covering, and one will be provided if a visitor does not have a face covering. For such meetings, our staff must use one of the office's large conference room spaces, which have been arranged so that all participants can maintain social distancing. The meeting space will be disinfected before each use.

The District Attorney's main phone line, 704-686-0700, remains operational, and staff are available to assist crime victims and other members of the public who have questions about their cases or court dates.

Safety measures within the office

All District Attorney's Office employees are required to wear face coverings in the office. As part of a gradual reopening plan, the office expects a reduced number of employees in the office at any given time. Each prosecution team's supervisor has been instructed to create schedules that will result in no more than a third of the team's prosecutors being present in the office on days when that team is not actively working in court. Prosecutors will continue teleworking from home when they are not scheduled to be in the office or in court. In May, the office established a mandatory check-in station for all employees and visitors. Anyone who enters the building must check in at the reception desk. This is being done as a contact tracing measure in the event that someone is exposed to COVID-19. The office will also receive enhanced cleanings to sanitize high-touch areas.

Precautions in the courthouse

Since the pandemic struck our community, District Attorney Merriweather and his leadership team have worked closely with local court officials to determine how to safely hold proceedings in the courthouse. District Attorney Merriweather has instructed all of his staff to wear face coverings inside the courthouse, practice social distancing and disinfect any surfaces where they may be working.

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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