

District Attorney's Office

State of North Carolina

26th Prosecutorial District

Mecklenburg County

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NEWS RELEASE

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Special DWI trial session leads to resolution of 627 cases

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – After 14 weeks of a special court session dedicated to driving while impaired offenses, the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office has resolved 627 cases, marking a significant step forward in addressing the backlog of DWI cases caused by COVID-19 court closures.

A report by the N.C. Administrative Office of the Courts estimated that, by the end of 2020, nearly 30 percent of Mecklenburg County's pending DWI cases were unresolved due to delays related to COVID-19. Recognizing the dire need to ensure accountability and safety on our community's roads, as well as more swift resolution for defendants, District Attorney Spencer Merriweather and his Misdemeanor Team developed plans for a special session to hold trials, argue motions before a judge, and accept guilty pleas.

"Through the most significant restrictions our court system has ever seen, I am pleased that members of my staff have demonstrated commitment and creativity in continuing to advance our case priorities in our courts," says District Attorney Spencer Merriweather. "It remains regretful that we have been in the position of choosing whether to try imminent domestic violence cases or important driving while impaired cases when justice demands that all of those cases are prioritized. As public health circumstances improve, we will continue to emphasize the importance of a full expansion of the courts in the weeks to come."

When COVID-19 struck our community, most District Court operations, including trials, came to a halt in March 2020. A year later, in March 2021, DWI trials resumed for the first time as Mecklenburg County courts began expanding operations. At that point, there was only one operational trial courtroom in District Court, where misdemeanors are prosecuted. The District Attorney's Office began using that one courtroom for its top two District Court priorities: DWIs and misdemeanor domestic violence cases.

Beginning June 7, 2021, the Chief District Court Judge opened a second District Court trial courtroom dedicated to addressing the DWI backlog. This special session was initially scheduled to last 10 weeks. But before the session hit the 10-week mark, the arrival of the Delta variant and increased community spread of COVID-19 halted the proceedings in August.

With safety measures in place, only one District Court trial courtroom reopened in September. The District Attorney's Office decided to use that courtroom to continue its work in DWI cases through the end of October. Starting this week, that single District Court trial courtroom will be devoted to misdemeanor domestic violence trials.

There is still much work to be done to address the backlog – in all kinds of misdemeanor and felony cases – and to ensure justice for victims, defendants, and the entire community. DA Merriweather continues to advocate for the safe reopening of additional court proceedings.

Note: For more information about the District Attorney's Office, visit www.charmeckda.com. For updates and other information, follow @CharMeckDA on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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