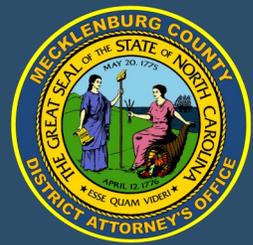




# FROM THE DESK OF DA MERRIWEATHER

The District Attorney's Office is responsible for the prosecution of criminal offenses in Mecklenburg County. Each month, this newsletter provides information about court happenings, initiatives being used to combat crime, the DA's work in the community, and more.



## Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office

### FAMILY SUPPORT

#### Legal assistant honored with award

Legal Assistant Jill Shelton says she will never forget the moment a family member walked to the front of a courtroom holding a stuffed bear. The court listened as the bear played the sound of a heartbeat, which had been recorded by the recipient of a heart donated after a young man was killed by an impaired driver.



That was one of so many moments that stand out in her mind as she reflects on her 22-year career with the DA's Office. The majority of that time has been spent with the Homicide Team as she has stood alongside thousands of families who have lost a loved one to homicide and guided them through the court process.

Last month, our regional Crime Victims' Coalition presented the Peter S. Gilchrist Lifetime Achievement Award to Ms. Shelton in recognition of her service and selfless support of families.

Ms. Shelton is one of three legal assistants assigned to the Homicide Team. Each of the DA's prosecution teams have legal assistants serving in critical roles as liaisons between the office and crime victims.

Ms. Shelton is a point of contact for homicide victims' families, informing them of upcoming court dates, connecting them with counseling or financial services, joining prosecutors for meetings with families, and even sitting with them throughout a trial. It is a difficult and, at times, heartbreaking job.

"It keeps me going knowing this is the worst time of their lives, and they need us to be strong and help them through it," she says.

For years, unknown to her colleagues, Ms. Shelton packed lunches for witnesses who could not afford to eat at the courthouse or brought clothes for people who did not have something to wear to court. She has cared for newborns so parents could testify or watch court proceedings. She and her husband brought a Thanksgiving meal to a grieving mother who lost her young child to gunfire.

"It never mattered who the victim was," wrote the prosecutor who nominated Ms. Shelton for the lifetime achievement award. "To Jill, a parent who has lost a child is simply a parent who has lost a child."

### IN COURT

The DA's prosecution teams continue to maximize trial time in the two courtrooms available for felony trials. In April, the DA's Special Victims, Homicide, Violent Crimes and Felony Crimes Teams all [called cases for trial before juries](#). Among those tried was a man who was found in possession of images showing children being sexually abused. The jury found him guilty as charged. During trial sessions so far this month, the Habitual Felon and Felony Crimes Teams secured fentanyl trafficking convictions. The DA's Homicide Team is currently in trial.

### MENTAL HEALTH

Over the course of his career, DA Merriweather has seen how various inequities affect people in and out of court, and one of the most significant inequities he sees in our courts surrounds mental health. It is alarming how many people do not receive mental health treatment—or even a diagnosis—until they are brought before the court for criminal charges. Early intervention is critical not only for an individual's wellbeing and success but also for community safety. The DA's Office continues to be actively engaged in Mecklenburg County's Wellness Court, a treatment court program that works with defendants facing mental health challenges. DA Merriweather wants to take things a step further. One of his goals is to develop early intervention practices that divert people experiencing mental illness out of the court system. May is Mental Health Awareness Month.

### FAQ: Does a victim's immigration status affect whether you'll prosecute the case?

No. We work to seek justice for *all people*. Certain populations are often targeted because assailants believe they will not report the crime or cooperate with prosecution due to fear of coming to court. That is a threat to the entire community's safety. Immigration matters are handled by federal agencies. The DA's Office is a state office. We are, however, involved in the U visa process, which is available to victims of certain crimes (such as domestic violence, sexual assaults, or other felony assaults). If a qualifying victim cooperated with the prosecution, we certify their petition and send it to the federal government, which makes the U visa determination.

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