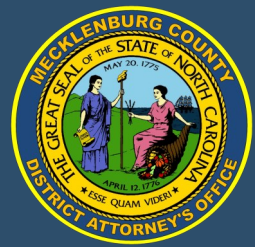




FROM THE DESK OF DA MERRIWEATHER

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

PREVENTION

Take a stand against sex abuse of children

This month, two critical awareness efforts intersect with the recognition of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This is a time to spread the word about child abuse prevention strategies and honor the voices of sexual assault survivors.



Sadly, sexual abuse of children is pervasive. About one in four girls and one in 13 boys in the United States experience child sexual abuse. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrator is someone the child or family knows.

Angel Mario Guzman-Lobo took advantage of the generosity of multiple Charlotte families, who he befriended through church and his own family members. While staying with these families, he sexually assaulted five girls between the ages of 7 and 12. This month, those five girls took the stand and bravely told a jury what Guzman-Lobo did to them. Their testimonies and the work of investigators and our Felony Special Victims Team resulted in a [guilty verdict](#) that will send Guzman-Lobo to prison for at least 50 years.

Our partners at [Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center](#) and the [Mecklenburg Child Abuse Prevention Team](#) have a number of tips and strategies that we, as a community, can employ to prevent the sexual abuse of children:

- Know the [signs of abuse](#), such as changes in behavior or school performance, and recognize that abuse can happen to any child in any community.
- Inquire about the child protection policies in any organization in which your child participates, and watch for "grooming" behaviors in adults who interact with children.
- [Teach children](#) the anatomically correct names for body parts, which body parts are private and should not be touched, and what to do if someone breaks that rule.
- Report any suspected abuse to authorities.

VICTIMS' RIGHTS

Every day, survivors of crime come into court in pursuit of justice, and every day, our office works to ensure their voices are heard. During National Crime Victims' Rights Week (April 23-29), we call on the community to help us create an environment where survivors are heard, believed, and supported. Crime has devastating impacts on individuals, families, and entire communities. To make meaningful changes to services, laws, and the justice system, we must incorporate the voices of survivors.



REVIEW TEAM

Understanding how domestic violence leads to homicide is a critical piece of how the DA's Office, local service providers, law enforcement, and advocates work to better serve survivors and prevent further violence. For years, the DA's Office has been involved in the Mecklenburg County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, which was created by state legislators to conduct thorough reviews of individual domestic violence homicides in hopes of identifying patterns that we can use to inform policy, procedure, and law changes. The team, which is conducting one of its reviews this month, specifically looks for interventions that could have prevented the homicides. Assistant District Attorney Pendergrass, supervisor of our Misdemeanor Special Victims Team, and Assistant District Attorney Varnes, a member of our Homicide Team, represent the DA's Office on the review team.

FAQ: What's the difference between District Court and Superior Court?

Generally, as far as criminal matters are concerned, District Court is where misdemeanors are prosecuted, and Superior Court is where felonies are prosecuted, however, misdemeanors that are connected with felony charges are often moved to Superior Court. There are no juries in District Court. In a misdemeanor trial, a District Court judge is the one who decides whether a defendant is guilty or not guilty. In North Carolina, a defendant can appeal a District Court conviction to Superior Court, where the defendant has a right to a trial by a jury. Juvenile court proceedings are also held in District Court.

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