

NEWS RELEASE

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DA Merriweather praises approval of legislation increasing accountability in bail decisions

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Today, the District Attorney's Office joins victims, neighborhood and business leaders, and law enforcement partners throughout our community in hailing the passage of the [Pretrial Integrity Act](#), which will ensure that only judges in an open court setting can make initial bail decisions related to many violent crimes and repeat offenders across the state.

Victims and their families, who find themselves forced to engage with the criminal justice system, are often shocked to find that the law allows criminal magistrates to set release conditions for a defendant before their first court date. Passage of the Pretrial Integrity Act now guarantees that, within 48 hours of arrest for a list of violent crimes ranging from Attempted Murder to Armed Robbery, only a District or Superior Court Judge can set bail for the defendant. For such charges, these judges will now have expanded discretion to decline to set *any* release conditions for these defendants.

Furthermore, this Act requires that if a defendant is arrested for any *new* crime while already on pretrial release for a pending criminal charge, except for minor traffic offenses, release conditions on the new offense may be set *only* by a District or Superior Court Judge. This change will enable judges to determine what, if any, services defendants may need to avoid reoffending while they await trial. Presently, when defendants are frequently arrested and immediately released before a court hearing, opportunities are missed to meet the mental health and substance use recovery needs that are often the root cause of repeated criminal behavior.

"Justice isn't about guaranteeing outcomes, but it should always be about ensuring accountability and raising public confidence," says DA Merriweather. "The passage of the Pretrial Integrity Act is itself an incremental step, but it is beyond gratifying to see our state government respond to crime victims' demand for a justice system that takes public safety seriously. Additionally, better attention to pretrial release decisions can make criminal prosecutions more viable and give our community the chance to interrupt a cycle of recidivism by confronting root causes of crime. With these new measures, victims and witnesses can have greater faith that the judges directly accountable to them will appropriately consider their safety in determining whether a defendant should be released."

The Pretrial Integrity Act enjoyed bipartisan support in the North Carolina General Assembly, with Rep. John Bradford serving as its chief sponsor. The bill cleared both chambers with sizeable majorities and with unanimous support from the Mecklenburg County legislative delegation, before ultimately being signed into law by Governor Roy Cooper.

Responding directly to the articulated concerns of impacted victims and community members, the Pretrial Integrity Act advanced forward with advocacy from law enforcement leaders throughout our region, including the six town police chiefs, the County Sheriff, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Chief Johnny Jennings, who led a local delegation—that included DA Merriweather—to the General Assembly earlier this year to urge the bill’s passage.

“The passage of this critical legislation represents a strong first step in our communities’ attempt to pursue the inextricably linked goals of justice **and** safety,” says DA Merriweather. “By placing these pretrial decisions in the hands of those officials who can be held directly accountable for them, this Act extends an open invitation for members of the public to keep paying attention to what goes on in our courts and to insist on thoughtfulness in pretrial decision making. The safety and justice of our community depends on no less.”

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