

2025



Year in Review

District Attorney's Office
26th Prosecutorial District
Of North Carolina
Mecklenburg County

A Message From

District Attorney Spencer B. Merriweather III

On behalf of the attorneys and staff of the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office, I want to express our gratitude to you for entrusting with each of us the responsibility to uphold the rule of law in our community. Every day, our team at the DA's Office dedicates itself to overcoming institutional limitations so that fairness, accountability, and peace can always prevail. As public servants sworn to promote safety and justice with integrity and passion, we offer the people of our community this review of the work done on their behalf. As your elected District Attorney, I thank you for the privilege of serving you, and, as always, without fear or favor, we commit to being an office worthy of your great trust.



Gratefully,

Spencer B. Merriweather III

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District Attorney



Mission & Introduction

District Attorney Spencer B. Merriweather III provides this annual report to the public as part of his ongoing commitment to communicate openly the work he and his prosecutors do on behalf of our community. This report offers a look back at 2025 and an opportunity to learn about each prosecutorial team, local initiatives, the office's community outreach, and more. The District Attorney's Office represents the State of North Carolina and prosecutes crimes and traffic offenses that occur in the State's 26th Prosecutorial District, which covers

Mecklenburg County and includes Charlotte, Mint Hill, Matthews, Pineville, Huntersville, Cornelius, and Davidson. The office prosecutes approximately 7,000 felonies and more than 60,000 misdemeanor and traffic offenses every year. Each day, the District Attorney's Office seeks to live out our mission: Entrusted with the confidence of the State and of the people of our County, we are to seek justice and to pursue outcomes that provide a safe and vibrant community where every person can live in peace.

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The Homicide Team

The Homicide Team seeks justice for victims and their families by prosecuting Mecklenburg County's most violent offenders. The Assistant District Attorneys on this team prosecute cases of murder, manslaughter, and felony death by vehicle. The Homicide Team also reviews all fatal officer-involved shootings. An Assistant District Attorney regularly attends the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Homicide Support Group to meet with victims' loved ones and answer their questions about the criminal justice system.

In 2025, the Homicide Team added a prosecutor giving them a total of 12 ADAs. Last year's office restructuring and the additional prosecutor positions HB 307 provided will allow the Homicide Team to add additional prosecutors in the months to come. The District Attorney's Office is resolving to adjudication an average of 126 homicide cases per year, a 53% increase in homicide case adjudication over the last decade. This comes despite a steady increase in homicide cases filed, as well as an exponential increase in the amount of digital evidence prosecutors must

review in each of these cases. In the three fiscal years prior to 2017, an average of 90 homicide cases were filed in Mecklenburg County Superior Court. Since then, an average of 121 homicide cases have been filed during each fiscal year--an increase of 36 percent.

The Homicide Team tried 14 defendants to verdict in 2025. In May, prosecutors tried Tyrone Miller for the shooting death of Charlotte cell phone store owner, Elchin Khalilov. A jury found him guilty, and he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Prosecutors tried Terry Connor Jr. and Steven Staples for the murder of Charlotte restaurant co-owner, Scott Brooks. They were both found guilty and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Seven more defendants were found guilty and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, and two pled guilty when called for trial. The team also reviewed three officer-involved shootings.

Public Safety in Center City

While attorneys and staff in the DA's Office have dedicated their careers to pursuing justice that ensures that every community member in Mecklenburg County can live in peace, Center City is distinct. As our community continues to grow, Center City faces increasingly complex challenges as it features the greatest population density of any single neighborhood across three states.

DA Merriweather serves on the Center City Public Safety Working Group formed in 2024 with the goal of creating a collective vision that emphasizes a safe and a vibrant Uptown Charlotte in which all people may live and thrive. The group includes representatives from the public, private, corporate, not-for-profit, public safety, medical, and academic sectors.

In December, DA Merriweather participated in a press conference with CMPD Chief Estella Patterson, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of NC Russ Ferguson, and other law enforcement partners to discuss CMPD's Operation Safe Season. The effort was aimed at increasing law enforcement's enhanced presence to deter crime in our Uptown/Entertainment district during the holiday season. While this effort was launched during the holiday season, our focus on keeping Uptown safe remains part of our mission every day. As part of that focus, DA Merriweather recently assigned prosecutors who will focus on violent crimes and quality of life crimes committed by repeat offenders in the Uptown/entertainment district. This model will be replicated in neighborhoods across Mecklenburg County.

In May, DA Merriweather met with members of Uptown's 4th Ward community to discuss our Office's work, hear their concerns, and determine how we can best meet their neighborhood needs through trial prioritization.



Office Restructuring

In June, DA Merriweather announced a restructuring of felony prosecution units in the DA's Office. Under the new design, Assistant District Attorneys (ADAs) from the Felony Crimes, Violent Crimes, and Habitual Felon Teams were reassigned to four (4) General Felony Teams.

Each ADA on these General Felony Teams will continue to be assigned one of three specialized subject area inventory types:



Violent Crimes - Some of Mecklenburg County's most violent offenses such as robbery, felony assault, and discharging a firearm into occupied property.

Habitual Felon - A wide range of felony offenses including burglaries, drug trafficking, and violent crimes. All of these cases share a common thread: they were perpetrated by repeat offenders who do harm to the community and can qualify for enhanced sentencing under the state's Habitual Felon law.

Felony Crimes - Property crimes, financial crimes, drug offenses, and other general, non-violent felonies.

Under the restructuring, prosecutors and their cases have now been dispersed across each of the new General Felony Teams, enabling the DA's Office to ensure the community's top priority cases are eligible for prosecution each week. Under this model, prosecution teams proceed with a six-week administrative/trial court rotation. This new model has afforded the DA's Office the ability to schedule a wider variety of cases for trial and administrative disposition, and it has increased flexibility in scheduling, without restricting prosecutors to only being able to pursue justice in cases of a certain type within a single week.

The General Felony Team

Following the restructuring, the DA's Habitual Felon, Felony Crimes, and Violent Crimes Teams have now merged into four General Felony Teams. This new model was launched in late June. Earlier in the year, the Habitual Felon Team tried 5 defendants, the Violent Crimes Team tried 8 defendants, and the Felony Crimes Team took 12 defendants to trial. In the second half of 2025, the newly constituted General Felony Team tried 32 defendants.

In November 2022, Mark Liventsov set a Cornelius home and vehicle on fire while a sleeping family of four and their three dogs occupied the home. Liventsov had been in a prolonged and contentious dispute with the two adult victims. Last April, a jury convicted him of four counts of attempted first-degree murder, first-degree arson, and multiple other charges. He was sentenced to 157-201 months in prison.

On October 24, 2023, Jacob Zazeski was late for work and driving recklessly on N. Sharon Amity Rd. The victim saw this reckless driving in his rear-view mirror

and gestured in exasperation at Zazeski when Zazeski passed him. While both Zazeski and the victim were stopped at a red light, the victim got out of his vehicle and approached the defendant's car with his hands up, showing Zazeski that he was unarmed. Zazeski fired 9 shots in the direction of the victim, striking him three times. In December, a jury found Zazeski guilty of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill inflicting serious injury, and he was sentenced to at least 5 years in prison.

Over a three-week span in the summer of 2024, Robert Brown, a habitual shoplifter, stole thousands of dollars of merchandise from area retailers. Loss prevention officers at one of the retailers reported watching Brown use a pair of scissors to cut "spider security wire" off electronic devices. Officers with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department stopped Brown before he could leave and arrested him. Last July, a jury found Brown guilty of multiple counts of larceny and being a habitual felon. He was sentenced to 160-204 months in prison.

The Felony Special Victims Team

The Felony Special Victims team was established by DA Merriweather in 2017. The team prosecutes felony cases of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and human trafficking. In 2025, they tried 17 cases to verdict by jury.

In May, Barry Broadway was found guilty of attempted first-degree murder and multiple other charges stemming from an assault on his girlfriend after she asked him to take out the trash. He strangled her multiple times to the point of unconsciousness, then Broadway delivered repeated blows to her face and head, using his fists and hard surfaces in the bathroom where the assault occurred. Broadway was sentenced to at least 20 years in prison.

Laquell Thames was sentenced in October to at least 20 years in prison after a jury convicted him of first-degree rape, first-degree kidnapping, and multiple other charges. In June 2021, after the survivor told Thames their relationship was over, he drove to her apartment, forced his way inside, threatened her with a gun, strangled her, and sexually assaulted her. She managed to get away, and Thames followed her around the Atrium University City Hospital multiple times before abandoning his pursuit of her and proceeding to lead CMPD on a multi-vehicle chase across Charlotte.



Advancing the Mission Through Partnerships

In April, ADA Leslie Stephens, in partnership with CMPD and Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center, spoke at a press conference announcing a community awareness campaign in recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Throughout the year, ADAs Kerri Fredheim and Caroline Massagee both provided instruction to groups of newly certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) for Atrium Health. SANE nurses

are medical professionals who have received specialized medical, psychological, and forensic training to conduct sexual assault evidentiary exams for rape victims. The ADAs taught multiple classes as part of the providers' requirement for SANE certification.



Last summer, Assistant District Attorney Terra Varnes presented on forensic career development, which included a case study in a session for high school students attending True Crime Camp at UNC Charlotte.

The Umbrella Center

Progress continued on The Umbrella Center, the Charlotte region's first Family Justice Center. In June, service providers from all partner agencies visited the future site of the Umbrella Center to see the "before" space and to write words of hope and inspiration on its walls. That same month, construction of the interior of the building began.

When it opens in 2026, The Umbrella Center will bring prosecutors, police, advocates, and other service providers together under one roof, which will allow crime survivors to access resources more easily and make their engagement more

likely in the prosecution of sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking. ADAs and staff from the DA's Office's Felony and Misdemeanor Special Victims Teams will have a permanent presence at the Umbrella Center.

DA Merriweather joined community partners throughout the year at the announcement of funding support for the Umbrella Center, and the \$42 million goal appears in reach before the end of 2026.



DA Merriweather and NC Attorney General Jeff Jackson at an Umbrella Center site visit in June

New Laws

Many new laws were enacted in 2025 that impact our work both in and out of the courtroom and will assure accountability for those who threaten the peace of our community.

House Bill 307 provides the most significant changes to pretrial confinement laws since the Pretrial Integrity Act, which was championed by DA Merriweather and CMPD Chief Johnny Jennings in 2023. Under HB 307, a judge must now consider a defendant's entire criminal history when setting pretrial release conditions. It also eliminated "written promises to appear" for violent crimes and requires evaluations for involuntary commitment if a defendant shows signs of being a possible danger to themselves or others. Under HB 307, a defendant who has been convicted of three or more offenses must post a secured bond in order to be released.

In such cases, the judge must provide written findings stating why those conditions are appropriate. Lastly, the bill provides funding for 10 additional ADA positions and 5 support staff positions for our office. Despite this community's exploding population growth, this is the first increase in DA's Office staff in over a decade.

Senate Bill 311 increased punishments for convicted felons who commit new felonies with firearms. Specifically, it provides new enhancements for felons who possess, brandish, or discharge a firearm in the commission or attempted commission of a new felony. The bill also provides for new punishment enhancements for those who manufacture, sell, or deliver fentanyl.

Community Outreach

Attending meetings hosted by neighborhood associations, church groups, civic organizations and more, the District Attorney's Office continued its commitment to engage actively with residents of Mecklenburg County and to confront their concerns about the criminal justice system. District Attorney Spencer Merriweather and other ADAs led discussions at these gatherings across our community.



More than 60 prosecutors visited nearly 40 National Night Out events across Mecklenburg County in August and October. Our staff look forward to these events each year and appreciate the chance to talk with residents about the work we do in and out of court.



Members of our staff also volunteer at local events and nonprofit organizations. In the spring, staff members visited Dress for Success Charlotte where they sorted clothing donations for those in need. In August, support staff members sorted food items donated from local stores at Second Harvest food bank.

The DA's Office also continues to engage with students to learn about the issues they face and to educate them about the criminal justice system and the work our office does within it.

In partnership with Mecklenburg County Council of the Boy Scouts of America, the District Attorney's Office's Exploring program inspires high school students interested in learning more about legal careers and the criminal justice system. The students learn crime scene investigations and take tours of the jail and courthouse, while the year concludes with a mock trial conducted by the students.

In November, ADA Dan McNeill, who leads the office's Exploring Program, attended a Career Fair organized by GenOne at East Mecklenburg High School. GenOne is a nonprofit that helps first-generation students from under-served communities navigate to and through college.



To request a prosecutor to speak at a community meeting, event, or school, please visit the District Attorney's website at www.charmeckda.com.



Several students from the 2025 Exploring class with Assistant District Attorney Sue Horton, who assisted them during the mock trial.

The Juvenile Team

The prosecutors of the Juvenile Team work to hold young people accountable for their actions while also connecting them with community resources to prevent at-risk youth from entering the criminal justice system as adult defendants. Under North Carolina law, the stated purpose of juvenile court is rehabilitation, and that requires services for young people.

In North Carolina, a juvenile complaint must be filed with a juvenile court counselor in the county where the alleged delinquent or undisciplined act occurred. Any person can submit a complaint to a juvenile court counselor. Typically, delinquency complaints are filed by law enforcement officers or school officials. In 2025, there were 3,464 delinquent complaints filed in Mecklenburg County; 2,225 of those complaints were approved by the N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice.

We continue to emphasize the need for a local juvenile detention center. Currently, those juveniles who require detainment are housed outside of the county, making it more difficult to ensure their appearance for court dates and hindering the ability of family members to visit them. While it is a significant event to

place a juvenile in detention status - a decision ultimately made by a judge - due to the frequency of violent behavior, it can often be the only option to interrupt dangerous behavior and to keep the community and the juveniles themselves safe.

In December 2024, legislation went into effect that mandates 16 and 17 year olds charged with class E felonies and higher will have such cases originate in our Superior Court (adult court). Under the previous 2019 law, even violent crime charges against 16 and 17 year olds originated in our juvenile court. For young offenders, the DA's Office takes seriously its obligation to consider thoughtfully which cases we will ask a judge or a grand jury to transfer to adult court. DA Merriweather continues to advocate for expanded accountability options in our juvenile justice system when young people commit violent crime.

In January, ADA Heather Taraska joined a panel discussion at the Impactful Mentoring Youth Summit hosted by Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Central Carolinas. The panel focused on juvenile crime prevention and accountability.

District Court and Appeals Teams

With an inventory of approximately 60,000 cases per year, the Misdemeanor Team, which prosecutes all traffic citations and misdemeanor crimes that occur in Mecklenburg County, has the highest caseload of any prosecution team in the District Attorney's Office.

The Misdemeanor Team leads an array of courts designed to advance cases to trial to satisfy the constitutional rights of both defendants and victims and to offer extrajudicial solutions to common conflicts. For example, "Private Warrant" Court provides an opportunity for mediation between parties involved in privately initiated, non-violent cases. Similarly, we actively engage in Recovery Courts that help connect those suffering from mental illness or substance use disorder to the treatment they need to sustain good health.

The Misdemeanor Special Victims Team prosecutes misdemeanor offenses that arise from intimate partner violence, as well as other crimes such as sexual battery, misdemeanor child abuse, and stalking. These attorneys and staff represent the front lines of a trauma-informed practice that attempts to hold offenders accountable before their acts worsen into behavior that presents an even greater threat to human life. The Misdemeanor Appeals Team prosecutes cases in which a defendant was convicted of a misdemeanor offense in District Court and then appeals that conviction to Superior Court for a jury trial, as permitted under North Carolina law. In 2025, the Misdemeanor Appeals Team tried 27 defendants.



ADAs Katharine Smyth, Chloe Saine, Caleb Karnes, Carson Ellis, and Lauren Mounts being sworn in last September.



DA presents awards for outstanding service

In December, the District Attorney's Office hosted its annual awards ceremony to recognize individuals who have provided outstanding service to the community and have advanced the mission of the District Attorney's Office. The awards are presented to community members who demonstrate outstanding leadership, law enforcement who go above and beyond the call of duty, and District Attorney's Office employees who work outside of the courtroom to better Mecklenburg County.

The Above and Beyond Citizen Award: Taneika Torres

Taneika Torres is a sexual assault nurse examiner who has dedicated her career to treating patients who come to the hospital reporting a sexual assault in Mecklenburg County. She helped develop and implement the first strangulation protocol to assist in treating survivors of intimate partner violence who report strangulation. The person who nominated Ms. Torres said, "To work with her is to know that she does this work not because it is easy but because it is a calling, and sexual assault survivors in Mecklenburg County have a better chance of seeing justice done in their case when Taneika is by their side."

The Above and Beyond Law Enforcement Award: Detective Andrew Key

Detective Andrew Key is a 12-year veteran of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. The nominators said of Det. Key, "He exemplifies the highest standards of dedication, professionalism, and compassion in law enforcement. Few understand the toll and courage required to review such evidence and pursue justice for the most vulnerable victims, yet Det. Key performed this work with unwavering professionalism and empathy."

Bryan Crocker Award: Alecia Brown

Alecia Brown has worked with the District Attorney's Office for 15 years, the last 12 of those as a support staff supervisor. In 2025, Alecia and her husband started a church called Go Church and have since been involved in organizing outreach events in the community. Alecia and her husband have spearheaded events like back-to-school backpack drives, assisting schoolteachers with much needed supplies, and have recently donated produce to families in need during the government shutdown. The person who nominated Mrs. Brown said, "Alecia has a humble and natural spirit of service. Her thoughtfulness—whether it be through her community outreach or in just offering a kind smile every single day—inspires me to embody her spirit of compassion."

District Attorney's Commendation for a Career of Exceptional Service: Ann Glaser

Ann Glaser retired in 2025 after decades of service to our community as a pioneer in child advocacy and 11 years with Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center. Pat's Place is a one-stop shop for children who have experienced child abuse. Ann frequently provided expert testimony in felony child abuse cases, using her mastery and knowledge to help jurors understand how child abuse affects children and how abusers exploit vulnerabilities to groom not only children, but also their families. As Chief Program Officer for Pat's Place CAC, Ann was responsible for several roles including cultivating multidisciplinary

agency relationships, securing grant funding for critical programming, engaging with community partners, and forensically interviewing children and teens about the worst moments of their lives.

District Attorney's Commendation for a Career of Exceptional Service: Johnny Jennings

With 33 years of service to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community, CMPD Police Chief Johnny Jennings retired in December after leading his department to new heights in innovation and accountability, community engagement, and officer well-being.

In his years at the helm, Chief Jennings would go on to demonstrate that the best police leadership can emphasize public safety and public service, without subverting one value in the name of the other. Chief Jennings has guided his department to steady reductions in both violent and property crime and has implemented strategies that have continued to decrease the number of illegal guns on Charlotte streets.

Chief Jennings was the lead champion for the passage of the 2023 Pretrial Integrity Act, which, at the time, was the most significant meaningful change to the law of pretrial release in a generation, ensuring that more violent and repeat offenders remained in custody as they awaited trial. This effort, combined with monumental efforts around enhancing officer recruitment and promoting employee wellness, has created a lasting impact in the advancement of public safety in Charlotte.

The background image shows the exterior of the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Charlotte, North Carolina. The building is made of light-colored stone and features a prominent portico with several Corinthian columns. The words "MECKLENBURG COUNTY COURT HOUSE" are engraved in a decorative band above the entrance. A large set of stone steps leads up to the entrance, which is flanked by two sets of double doors. The sky is clear and blue. A solid blue rectangular overlay covers the middle portion of the image, containing the contact information.

Contact Us

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