

# NEWS RELEASE

Spencer B. Merriweather  
III  
District Attorney

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## Felony Special Victims trial session reveals flaws in strangulation law, despite convictions

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - The Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Felony Special Victims Team convicted two defendants at trial during a recent trial session. The proceedings, which began on April 6, 2026, and concluded on April 10, 2026, were held in courtrooms 5110 and 5170, before the Honorable George C. Bell and the Honorable David H. Strickland, Superior Court Judges.

Demont Forte, 50, was tried for 1) assault by strangulation and 2) assault on a female. The jury found him *guilty* of assault on a female and *not guilty* of assault by strangulation. Judge Bell sentenced Forte to 150 days in jail; that sentence was suspended pending his successful completion of 24 months of supervised probation. As a condition of the probation, Forte must serve a split sentence of 30 days in jail. The sentence will run consecutive to the sentence Forte is serving for a [previous conviction](#).

Around 3:30 p.m. on January 31, 2023, the victim was at the Orvis St. home of her then significant other, Demont Forte. While there, a dispute erupted between the victim and a third party inside which quickly escalated, and she went outside to let things cool down. As she was on the front porch, Forte antagonized her repeatedly by taunting her and throwing her belongings out into the yard. After enduring his taunts and harassment, the victim sat down on the front steps for a moment to collect herself after Forte went back inside. Out of nowhere, the defendant opened the door and launched himself at her, kicking her in the back of the head before getting on top of her and clutching both hands [\[1\]](#) around her neck as he held her to the ground; the victim's legs were flailing and she was clawing at his arms for release as he squeezed her neck for over ten seconds. Forte eventually let go and returned indoors. The victim then sat up and again attempted to collect her composure while seated on the front steps, reeling from what had just occurred. While she sat there, the defendant again leapt from inside onto the porch and struck the victim so forcefully in the face from behind that she was knocked over on her side into the porch railing. Fortunately, a CMPD Animal Control officer was in the vicinity for the second blow and was able to intervene and deescalate the situation while he waited for sworn law enforcement officers to arrive.

Leland Forrest, 56, was tried for 1) assault by strangulation and 2) assault on a female. The jury found him *guilty* of assault on a female and *not guilty* of assault by strangulation. Judge Strickland sentenced him to 150 days in jail.

On October 3, 2022, Leland Forrest and the victim, who were dating and in the process of moving in with each other, had a verbal dispute over the phone. Shortly after that, Forrest arrived at the victim's residence and continued the argument. He followed the victim into her bedroom and used his fingers to forcefully squeeze her cheeks together, causing lacerations to the inside of her mouth. He then grasped her neck, squeezing it with his hand to the point she lost consciousness and fell to the floor. Then he stepped on her neck with his foot. The victim was able to get away. During the trial, the victim's now-16-year-old daughter, who had been in her own bedroom at the time of the incident, testified about her mother's injuries. The victim's daughter ultimately called relatives who were able to call the police for help.

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Each of these cases underscores the challenges created by NC strangulation laws in their current form. Under existing statute, Assault by Strangulation (a Class H felony) requires the presence of physical injury, which often is not apparent for hours—and sometimes even days—after the offense.

Last year, the NC General Assembly passed HB308, but a provision that would have clarified the legal definition of strangulation and enhanced penalties for that crime was pulled from the bill before it passed the NC Senate. Presently, Assault by Strangulation carries a maximum punishment of 39 months in prison, but, depending on a person's criminal conviction history, such offenders can often be sentenced to a term of probation.

Strangulation is one of the most lethal—and common—methods of intimate partner abuse, and research shows that it may be a significant predictor of future lethal violence. Strangulation is generally understood as an intentional act committed when a person externally applies pressure to the throat of another to restrict breathing or the circulation of blood. Under current North Carolina law, the prohibition on strangulation does not specifically include acts of suffocation (means of breathing restriction other than pressure to the throat), as other states do. As the General Assembly begins its short session this week, we remain hopeful that policymakers will take action to expand legal prohibitions on strangulation and enhance penalties for commission of these acts.

## Exhibits

Demont Forte clutches the victim's throat with both hands.



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