

## Office of the District Attorney

### 3 District

Faris C. Dixon  
District Attorney

P. O. Box 8185  
Greenville, NC 27835-8185

(252) 695-7200

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2020

#### Contact Information:

Faris C. Dixon, Jr.  
Pitt County District Attorney  
100 West Third Street  
Greenville, North Carolina 27858  
(252) 695-7250

#### DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE ADOPTS STRATEGIES FOR COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The spread of COVID-19 has created extraordinary challenges for the criminal justice system across our nation and our state. With input and guidance from our local and state-wide criminal justice community, the Pitt County District Attorney's Office has adopted strategies for meeting these challenges while continuing to protect the health and safety of our citizens and our staff. Though the situation changes every day, we wanted to share some information about case continuances and our current plans for handling our most serious or most frequent criminal matters, including jail cases, felony cases, and traffic tickets.

**Case continuances.** On March 13, Chief Justice Cheri Beasley ordered the postponement of most superior and district court proceedings for at least 30 days to protect the health and safety of the public and judicial system employees. Certain proceedings necessary to preserve the right to due process of law were excepted from the order. In criminal court, these proceedings include first appearances, bond hearings, probable cause hearings, and probation hearings. Other proceedings, such as pleas, may also be excepted if they can be conducted under conditions that protect the health and safety of all participants.

Pursuant to Justice Beasley's order, the clerk's office will be continuing criminal cases to new court dates. The new court dates may not be updated in the court system until after the originally-scheduled date has passed. If you do not receive notice of your new court date, you can check your court date online by visiting <https://www.nccourts.gov/court-dates>. You can also subscribe to email or text message court date notifications and reminders by visiting <https://www.nccourts.gov/services>.

**Jail cases.** Delayed court proceedings and rising COVID-19 cases have raised due process, public safety, and public health concerns about defendants in custody at the Pitt County Detention Center. While we can effectively implement social distancing and stay-at-home procedures in our community, staff and inmates at detention centers cannot. Local jails like PCDC primarily house defendants convicted of lower-level offenses who are serving shorter sentences, or defendants who are being held pre-trial, have not yet been convicted, and have not made bond. This

means that individuals are frequently coming into and out of PCDC, increasing the risk of exposure for staff, inmates, and our community.

The District Attorney's Office is working closely with our local judges, defense attorneys, clerks, and the Pitt County Sheriff's Office to assess inmate cases and develop an appropriate response tailored to each case. Our goal is to limit the number of individuals housed at PCDC to protect public health without compromising public safety. One priority has been unsecuring bonds for defendants detained pre-trial on non-violent felonies who do NOT pose a threat to the public. Another priority is resolving the cases of defendants who, due to age or health, are at higher risk for COVID-19. Detention officers and medical staff at PCDC have been instrumental in helping us identify these cases. Our district and superior court judges, defense attorneys, clerks, and bailiffs have coordinated with us to move up these cases for plea. Our office greatly appreciates their assistance.

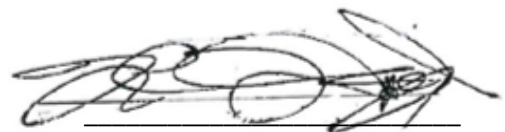
**Felony cases.** Our staff is also reviewing felony cases of defendants who will not be released from or are not currently in custody so that we are prepared to move forward on those cases as soon as court resumes. Our Assistant District Attorneys who are often in court several times a week are using this time of limited court as an opportunity to read additional case files and prepare cases for plea, indictment, and trial. Our prosecutors who primarily handle district court matters have begun screening more felony cases while also planning for increased daily caseloads when district court resumes.

We continue to consult with local law enforcement and probation officers, and we appreciate their willingness to help us make the most progress during extraordinary circumstances. Our implementation of electronic discovery last year, which enabled officers to begin submitting their reports electronically, has become crucial in recent weeks by reducing the amount of contact and exposure in our workplace and theirs.

**Traffic tickets.** To prevent an overwhelming backlog of traffic tickets in district court, our office is encouraging the public to handle their traffic tickets online if possible. We have prepared a press release with important information about online ticket payment, dismissal, and reduction. We also encourage citizens to contact an attorney of their choice if they need assistance or advice on the best way to handle their citation.

**Our office remains open.** The District Attorney's Office remains open and our employees continue to work diligently during this period. I would like to personally thank my staff for their great work over the last two weeks. They have continued to look out for the safety and interests of the citizens of Pitt County while taking steps to keep themselves and their families protected. We have implemented staggered schedules and work-from-home policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within our office while ensuring that necessary work gets done. We are grateful to the wonderful staff who clean our office and our courthouse every day, helping us to stay healthy.

Though the outbreak of COVID-19 seems in many ways unprecedented, our nation has met challenges like this before. Our older generations endured the 1918 Pandemic and the Great Depression between two World Wars. At the turn of this century, we faced together the tragedy of September 11, and children who remember that day grew up to enter the workforce during a great recession. Our ability to pull together and take care of one another will get us through the current crisis just as it did in our past.



Faris C. Dixon, Jr.  
Pitt County District Attorney