



Durham CAN
(Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods)
732 Ninth Street, #604, Durham, NC 27705
(919) 627-1769 www.DurhamCAN.org

April 27, 2020

Satana Deberry
District Attorney, Durham County

Dear Ms. Deberry,

We write to follow up on our letter of March 27 and our conversation on April 2. First, thank you for your efforts in reducing our county's jail population during this pandemic. As of this morning the jail population is 265. That number was nearly 500 when you took office, and it was over 360 five weeks ago. The drastic reduction, achieved through a combination of fewer and lower pretrial bonds and sensible plea agreements, is laudable. We thank you, the defense bar, and the responsible magistrates and judges for such quick and dramatic action in deference to public health.

Just as importantly, thank you for your administration's consent to sentencing relief for some of our neighbors serving state prison sentences. We have observed that other elected prosecutors in North Carolina have declined to take similar steps. We applaud your courage and compassion. As public health officials predicted, the virus has made its way into our state prison system. Hundreds of inmates have been infected with the coronavirus; at least two have died. We are grateful that through your actions, along with the advocacy of the inmates' lawyers and with the approval of Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Orlando Hudson, 14 of our neighbors have returned to their families and communities instead of waiting to get sick behind prison walls.

We especially thank you for providing sentencing relief to Mr. Linwood McDonald, the man we wrote about in our March 27 letter. As you know, Mr. McDonald served nearly 22 years in prison for drug offenses. Today, Mr. McDonald is grateful and excited to be safe and sound and healthy in Durham (and still figuring out the features of his new phone).

Finally, we look forward to continuing our conversation with you. The return of 14 citizens is a great accomplishment. But we believe many more of our brothers and sisters fit the reasonable criteria outlined in our last letter for sentencing relief consideration. We note that during our last conversation you agreed to talk with us again within eight weeks. We hope at that time to be able to acknowledge continuing efforts by your office to bring people home during this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Durham Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods