



BURKE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Steve Whisenant

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With the planned dissolution of the Burke County Narcotics Task Force (BCNTF) scheduled for June 30, 2018, Sheriff Whisenant had planned to reorganize the narcotics investigations within the Sheriff's Office to begin July 1, 2018. Due to circumstances with the BCNTF, that reorganization has been accelerated to begin immediately.

The Burke County Sheriff's Office has incorporated the narcotics investigators into the Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division (CID). Those officers will be supervised by the CID Lieutenant with administrative oversight by the Major at the Sheriff's Office.

In addition to who supervises the narcotics officers, the narcotics division's mission and focus has been modified. Sheriff Whisenant has been publicly speaking for some time about the correlation between substance abuse and crime with quotes including, "almost all of our property crimes, such as larcenies and breaking and enterings are committed by substance abusers. Most violent crimes, including homicides in the past seven years have involved illegal drugs in some manner."

In preparing for the change in drug enforcement philosophy, Sheriff Whisenant, accompanied by Burke County CID supervisors and narcotics officers met with District Attorney Learner, Sr. Resident Superior Court Judge Ervin, Chief District Court Judge Cherry, and administrators and supervisors of the NC Public Safety's Probation Division to seek their support in this new initiative and philosophy. Their support was given.

Sheriff Whisenant's initiative includes a two-prong approach. In addition to continuing the collaborative work with federal and state authorities targeting major drug dealers, (1) the Sheriff's Office will begin more aggressive enforcement of criminal laws for small-time dealers and habitual addicts. (2) Secondly, the Sheriff's Office will develop a path of treatment for offenders who meet certain criteria and who have a commitment to change their behavior. The Sheriff's Office has been researching the LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program) as one method of achieving these goals.

Part of the treatment initiative to reduce substance abuse has been a positive working relationship with Catawba Valley Behavioral Healthcare (CVBH). CVBH has recently obtained a three-year grant from Kate B. Reynolds. This grant will provide a case manager for the Burke County jails to work with inmates while incarcerated as well as when released. With no cost to the taxpayers, this new position will be meeting many of the concerns that have been shared with CVBH, including the following quote.

Substance abuse has a direct correlation with crime. If we reduce substance abuse; we reduce crime. Unfortunately our jails have significant numbers of persons who are addicted to prescription and/or illicit drugs as well as incarcerated persons who are suffering from mental illnesses and some who are homeless. We cannot arrest our way out of this growing problem. Releasing such persons to their same environments, with no jobs, without treatment, support, and/or social plans only exacerbates these issues.

(Burke County Sheriff Steve Whisenant)

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