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RESPONSE TO WSOC-TV NEWS ARTICLE:

"MECKLENBURG COUNTY JUDGE SAYS FIXING BONDS IS UP TO LEGISLATURE"

[CHARLOTTE, NC, March 23, 2023----] On March 21, 2023, WSOC-TV Crime Reporter Hunter Sáenz sat down with Mecklenburg County Chief District Court Judge Elizabeth Trosch over concerns on how bonds are administered to violent, and often, repeat offenders. It is a disgrace to hear that Judge Elizabeth Trosch is blaming the legislature when the bail policy in each county is, in part, administered by Chief District Court Judges (her). Last updated in 2019, the "Bail Policy for Twenty-Sixth Judicial District" [Mecklenburg County, NC], states that "protecting victims, witnesses, and the community from threat, danger, and minimizing the unnecessary use of secure detention" is the purpose of this policy.

Our community is suffering from a significant spike in homicides, and violent crime is reported daily. Judge Elizabeth Trosch is not relying on the legislature to fix this problem – because it is a problem occurring only in counties and states that cater to criminals – and is a problem she helped create. Look around North Carolina and you will see a clear difference in how bonds are issued despite following the same rules the legislature currently allows. Judge Elizabeth Trosch is doing what every failed leader does – casting blame on someone else.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fraternal Order of Police has never opposed unsecured, low, or no bonds for minor, non-habitual offenses and believes them to be appropriate in many cases. Our issue is, and always has been, low and unsecured bonds for violent and heinous criminal offenders, especially those with a history of violence along with improper decisions made by magistrates.

For example, on June 1, 2022, a Mecklenburg County Magistrate erred when they issued a bond for Jacob Lawler, an 18-year-old student who made a threat of violence against students at Bradford Preparatory School days before graduation. The Magistrate had no legal authority to issue a bond since § 15a-534.7 states that bond conditions for this charge shall be set by a judge, not a magistrate. An emergency hearing was held to correct the magistrate's mistake.

On March 19, 2022, Tyler Drew retrieved a rifle from a vehicle and shot it repeatedly in the direction of several nearby Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Officers and many more innocent citizens. Luckily no one was injured and CMPD Officers heroically arrested him without firing a single shot. After his arrest, Drew was released from jail in less than twenty-four hours because his bond was set at only \$67,000; despite him being a convicted felon, a charge that legally prohibits anyone from possessing a firearm at all.

On January 1, 2023, Michael Pringle was arrested in the News Years' Day death of Ningmua Ayumbi Ntungwen. Charged with first-degree intentional murder, Pringle was initially not given a bond, which is both appropriate and legal, for this crime. However, Judge Jennifer Fleet later reduced his bond to \$250,000 and he was released from jail.

THE NORTH CAROLINA FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE, LODGE #9



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On February 1, 2023, Demont Forte was released from jail after posting a \$5,000 bond for assault by strangulation, felony stalking, assault on a female, assault with a deadly weapon, and assault on a government official. Forte was on pre-trial release at the time for having committed similar acts to the same female victim. Forte is a convicted habitual felon and was convicted of manslaughter.

On March 7, 2023, Akingbiwaju Joseph Opadele, was arrested and accused of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old female patient. Opadale was an EMS Worker and the victim relied on his care as a medical professional. While alone in the back of an ambulance, he placed his hands inside her pants and violated her. He was arrested and, despite known forensic evidence, was given a \$15,000 UNSECURED BOND, which allowed him to walk from jail in just 37 minutes since no monies are required to be paid when a bond is unsecured.

Just this week, Willie James Jr. was arrested after he cut off a court-ordered ankle monitor while out on pre-trial release for a pending first-degree murder charge. James Jr. had cut off his monitor in February just as his trial was beginning and had been on the run for almost a month before being re-arrested. After being recaptured a magistrate gave James Jr. a \$250,000 bond which was later revoked by a judge because the magistrate overstepped their authority by issuing a bond.

We have highlighted only a few recent cases; unfortunately, there are many more. When the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief speaks publicly about his frustration with the bond policy you know it is an issue. When the Mecklenburg County District Attorney speaks publicly about his frustration with the bond policy, you know it is an issue. When Sheriffs from surrounding counties speak out about crime from Charlotte spilling into their communities, you know it is an issue.

We would be remiss to not say that we have some amazing judges and magistrates in Mecklenburg County. However, there is grave concern over the pro-criminal social bond policy that places at risk the lives of people in this county every day. Added are errors by magistrates failing to know they cannot issue bonds in certain matters. Judge Elizabeth Trosch is the overseer of both, and she has failed Mecklenburg County. We cannot wait for the legislature to do what our current laws will allow while violent offenders prey on our citizens. It is time for Judge Elizabeth Trosch to resign and push her social agenda outside of the courtroom.

Daniel Redford, President
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Fraternal Order of Police

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[The FOP is an organization representing law enforcement professionals with training, leadership, and support for our members. We are a united voice within Charlotte-Mecklenburg working together for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. We also work on legislation that makes our communities safer. It is our mission to further promote the values of the law enforcement profession and work with the community and governmental leaders to make Mecklenburg County a safe place to live, work, and enjoy! If you would like more information or have questions, please email us at fop9@ncfoplodge9.com.]

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