

**North Carolina Advisory Council on Cannabis
Public Safety Subcommittee**

Co-Chairs:

*Anca Grozav, Chief Deputy Budget Director, NC Office of State Budget and Management
Joy Strickland, Senior Deputy Attorney General, Criminal Bureau of the North Carolina Department
of Justice*

Meeting Minutes

August 27, 2026, 1:00-3:00pm
Virtual via Teams

Attendees

Council Members Present – Anca Grozav, Pat Oglesby; Joy Strickland; Kris Gardner; David Alexander;
Rep. Zack Hawkins

Council Members Absent – Arthur Apolinario; Dr. Larry Greenblatt; Lillie Rhodes

Staff Members Present – Kaycee Deen; Charles Mitchell; Anne Doyle

Guest Speakers — Kimberly Spahos; Phil Dixon; Chris Anderson; Anitra Sessoms

Agenda

I. Welcome, Roll Call, and Ethics Statement

II. Discussion of Criminal Justice Interplay

a. Training for District Attorneys

- i. Guest Speaker: Kimberly Spahos, Director of Conference of District Attorneys

b. Training for Judges

- i. Guest Speaker: Phil Dixon, Institute of Government

c. Training for Law Enforcement—In-Service Training

- i. Guest Speaker: Chris Anderson, Deputy Director, North Carolina Justice Academy

d. Expunctions

- i. Guest Speaker: Anitra Sessoms, Supervisor of Expungement Unit, SBI Criminal Information and Identification Section

III. New Business and Next Steps

Discussion: Training for District Attorneys [Kimberly Spahos]

- Scope: Training prosecutors and their teams
 - In 2025, through 67 sponsored courses and nearly 200 other special request programs, the Conference of District Attorneys trained over 10,000 people throughout North Carolina
 - Train not just prosecutors within DA offices across NC, but also members of the NC Department of Justice or the Department of Insurance

Q: Would it make sense to train prosecutors before legislation become effective?

- A: Yes, the Crimes Victims' Rights Amendment is an example of this. When this passed in NC, there was a lead time that included many months. So, the legislation was finalized and that gave us an opportunity to offer programming at summer and fall meetings to ensure that we were able to give the information about what the law was requiring. Significant law changes, your initial training is always on what the statutes instruct, but training on the practical implementation of the law allows lead time so the program can add it to conferences. As much lead time as possible is helpful to get the word out.

Q: What does the specific training for impaired driving cases related to drugs other than alcohol?

- A: Highway Safety is a huge partner with Conference of District Attorneys for training prosecutors, law enforcement and other allied professionals in the area of impaired driving. The Conference offers a lot of programming. In the last four or five years, the Conference has increased that amount of training, which brings in speakers from across the country who have experienced legalization of marijuana (medical or otherwise) and incorporates trial advocacy.

Q: If legalization is passed, lead time is importance for success of enforcing that law across the state? I think we need to slow the pace because if the legislature cannot approve this overnight or it will be a disaster. Also, you mentioned training to prosecutors and law enforcement—what struggles are you seeing from the Conference of DAs to enforce appreciate impairment for cannabis as it exists under our current laws?

- A: The enforcement side. Getting road officers to recognize impairment but also recognize the observations for differences in impairment (detection) between cannabis and other drugs/alcohol is a challenge. Even though we have a legal limit of .08 for alcohol, many people are significantly impaired below that level. So, the impairment level really needs to be looked at alongside observations of impairment from law enforcement. A blood sample is necessary, and the volume of testing and resources is a barrier to moving cases ahead in a timely manner. Colleagues have discussed the sharp increase in impaired driving, and the lab can have difficulty handling that.

Q: Can you explain the criticality that it creates on the back end when prosecutors don't receive a lab report and sufficient time for prosecution?

- A: Lab results are a significant piece of evidence in impaired driving cases, especially with substances other than alcohol. So, it's delaying justice, but it's also delaying a defendant's right.

Q: How much funding would the Conference of DAs need to train 34,000 law enforcement officers, judges, and district attorneys and magistrates if a cannabis adult use law passed?

- A: The current resources for our training is significant, and a lift like that, would come with quite a large fiscal note to train everyone well. It would be extremely unreasonable to complete this type of training in a short amount of time. Six months would potentially be reasonable.

Q: You mentioned that there is a bottleneck right now with the State Crime Lab and the resources they need, so do you have a sense of how much more time it would need beyond six months?

- A: The turnaround from a sample getting submitted for a blood test for drug impaired driving

cases is significant, meaning it can even take many months.

Q: Isn't there a need for resources now with the availability of hemp right now?

- A: Yes, in an unregulated industry, that is certainly a concern for prosecutors and law enforcement. So, resources are needed now and we would certainly need more depending on the legislation.

Discussion: Training for Judges [Dr. Phil Dixon, Professor of Public Law and Government at UNC]

- The UNC School of Government contracts with indigent defense services IDS to provide the primary training arm for IDS. Typically train around 1200 defense lawyers a year, primarily public defenders. However, we also train judges: District Court Conference in June and District Court Judge Conference in October.
- Dr. Dixon has been doing this cannabis training for a while. Training typically focuses on criminal law. Slightly more flexible than Conference for DAs.
- Judges are involved in planning the content and the substantive material on the agenda. They get together.
- Lead time would be helpful. We're already contracted with ASC to provide this training. It would be resource-intensive to create an online module, special webinar to or travel.
- The School of Government would be writing and creating resources if marijuana was legalized.

Q: If you were able to train the judges, the District Court judges in one setting and the Superior Court judges in another, how long are those trainings per topic area?

- A: It depends. More hands-on training like leadership training uses more discussion in addition to lectures. We have to wait for the law to be applied in practice before we can train when there are ambiguities in the statute.

Q: If the training did occur, it seems like it would be around 90 minutes and that it may be fair to say it's considerably less than the training for prosecutors or law enforcement?

- A: Defenders are my main call. Yes, but the training is ongoing, and if there's a real significant change, we're going to cover it both online and in-person so it's accessible. As it evolves, we'll return to the subject.

Q: When you had to deal with something as significant as legalizing cannabis, you spoke about a 6–8-month lead for training, is that correct?

- A: No, that's just how far out we plan the content. If it's something big, it's going to be on the agenda and it's going to be covered at the next program or next several programs.

Q: Do you have a sense of what the additional cost would be? Or would there be an additional cost?

- A: I tend not to think so. If there's regional trainings across the state, that would be more expensive. But we get most of the people at our annual conferences, and we get it to people for free twice a year. I would be covering any kind of change like this anyway. If I needed to tailor it to law enforcement, that would be different and be a bit more resource intensive (and traveling), but I don't think any change would occur to IDS because they already contract to

School of Government.

Discussion: Training for Law Enforcement [Chris Anderson]

- The NC Justice Academy is part of the Department of Justice and Chris is Deputy Director for both of the two campuses.
- Discuss scheduling and how mandated in-service training works.
- The Joint Training Committee meets every September and approves the upcoming year's training. This September's meeting will approve 2027 lesson plans. We will also select 2028 training topics.
- Each law enforcement officer, telecommunicator, and detention officer across the state has to complete those in-service training hours each year.
- We have a whole team of instructors to develop the lesson plans and write the curriculum, but we also have a team to make them available online.

Q: if there's major legislation change with cannabis legalization. Knowing that the training curriculum is already decided for the year ahead, how does it impact resources if new information needs to be added related to significant legislation change?

- A: Any time there's new legislation and occurs new training to be added, it impacts our timeline and resources. Right now, our resources are operating above capacity. So, we would need resources to develop new lesson plans and online delivery. It takes 6-8 months at a minimum to get the training out to the field statewide.

Q: Does that 6-8 months depend on the length of the module that would be provided to law?

- A: Yes, it would. Most trainings are between 2 and 4 hours within the in-service product. If it's any type of large change, like a regulated market, or if the implementation is complex, it will require more in depth training than what we could offer. It would throw off those hours. If it were significant, we would like to have it as a separate training topic.

Discussion: Expunctions [Anitra Sessoms]

- Anitra is addressing the landscape for how expunctions work in her unit because the SBI (as well as AOC) is running the expungement forms to give information to judges in certain instances.
- SBI is in charge of deleting the charges off a person's criminal history
 - Granted orders versus automated orders
- In the last year, 129,000 orders came in and that unit processed 128,000. Currently, SBI is processing orders they received in the month of June.
- So, SBI needs more assistance when it comes to processing.
- One challenge: Exactly how would you determine what charge code you would be using for the automated orders.
 - An individual arrested for simple possession of marijuana may ultimately be charged, pled, or convicted under a different code, and in some cases arresting officers use an incorrect or generic charge code. This creates ambiguity in determining which records should qualify for automatic expunction, and her unit is sometimes left to manually determine the true underlying charge.

- Straight dismissals or not-guilty/not-responsible orders, which the unit runs against the criminal history and processes directly.
- Conviction expunctions, which require a two-step process: the unit first runs a petition to authorize a background check, sends results to the judge, and then processes the judge's granted order once returned.
- *Automated expunctions* — in place since December 2021, these originate at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The SBI receives a nightly data download of AOC-processed automatic expunctions. The majority require no manual review, but any record that doesn't match up cleanly requires staff to intervene, which occurs more frequently than anticipated.

Q: How many more people do you think your unit at SBI need?

- A: We would need an additional three to four new employees ideally.

Q: Are there IT people on staff or is it contracted?

- A: On staff

New Business and Next Steps

- Speakers for September Meeting
 - Jamie Patten (Virginia Cannabis Control Agency) will attend September 25 meeting
 - Lila McKinley (Director of Cannabis Control Division in CT) is attending September 25 meeting to discuss the unique CT tax structure
 - Trying to get someone from NY
- Speakers for October Meeting
 - A couple of experts lined up with different perspectives
 - Tax foundation
 - CA Department of Cannabis Control
 - Colorado Department of Revenue

Adjournment

Meeting concluded at 2:14pm.

Next Meeting Date: Friday, September 25 from 1:00-3:00pm