



News Release

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Misdemeanor Diversion Program Holds First Session

FAYETTEVILLE – The Cumberland County Misdemeanor Diversion Program (MDP) held its first session on Nov. 18 in the Courthouse. Five youths attended the required session, which was presided over by District Court Judge Ed Pone. The teenagers were referred to the program by law enforcement officers and have the chance to avoid prosecution for minor offenses if they complete the requirements.

Superior Court Judge Gale M. Adams explained the importance of self-respect, responsibility and making good decisions. Pone reviewed the consequences the youths face if they have a misdemeanor on their records and cautioned them not to undermine one of the program's benefits by posting information about the experience on social media.

“You have been given a tremendous break,” Pone said. “I think you should thank the law enforcement officers because they could have very easily have given you a citation.”

The MDP is a program for 16- and 17-year-olds who have no adult criminal record. North Carolina prosecutes all 16- and 17-year-olds charged with criminal offenses in the adult system.

Rather than issuing a citation or making an arrest where probable cause exists, law enforcement officers in Cumberland County can issue the youth a referral with instructions to contact the Misdemeanor Diversion Program. The teenager has 90 days to complete the program, which may include community service, classes, mentoring and other requirements. If the teen does not complete the assigned program, law enforcement will be notified and can opt to move forward with criminal court prosecution.

The eligibility requirements are:

- 16 or 17 years old at time of offense
- No adult criminal record (can have a juvenile record)
- Must be a misdemeanor offense. However, sex offenses, firearms offenses and traffic offenses are specifically excluded
- Final discretion on MDP referral remains with law enforcement officers and the District Attorney's Office

The diversion program is a collaborative effort between Cumberland County government, law enforcement, the District Attorney's office, public defender and court system officials. The participants' parents attended the session, along with Board of Commissioners Vice Chairman Glenn Adams, District Court Judge Stephen Stokes, Cumberland County Sheriff's Legal Counsel Ronnie Mitchell, Pretrial Services Assistant Director Caroline Melvin, Chief Jailer Maj. Tandra Adams and several deputies from the Cumberland County Detention Center, and Debra Mintz and Margo Jarvis of the Arts Council.



Superior Court Judge Gale M. Adams holds up an inspirational poster as she talks to youth about the importance of self-respect, responsibility and making good decisions during the first session of the Cumberland County Misdemeanor Program Nov. 18. Adams and presiding District Court Judge Ed Pone (pictured at bench) spoke to five participants in the program.