



North Carolina

**2020 Primary Election Candidate Questionnaire
Board of Commissioners - Mecklenburg County**

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of North Carolina, a nonpartisan organization, would like to provide voters with information about where candidates stand on important issues relating to the criminal legal system. Our goal is to educate voters about local candidates' positions on important issues.

All primary candidates for Mecklenburg County Commissioner are receiving this questionnaire. Responses will be made publicly available.

2020 Primary Election Candidate Questionnaire Board of Commissioners - Mecklenburg County

CANDIDATE NAME: Cade Lee

In Mecklenburg County, as many as 90 percent of the people in jail are being held before their day in court and without being convicted of any crime. Some of those people will pay hard-earned money to secure their release before trial, but many who cannot afford to pay money bail could be stuck in jail for days or weeks.

Studies show that spending just three days in jail can cause a person to lose their job, home, or custody of their children. And research suggests that pretrial detention increases the likelihood that a person will be convicted and receive a longer sentence. All of these harms disproportionately affect people of color and people who are living in poverty.

There are many ways to reduce the harm caused by jailing people before trial, and Mecklenburg County court officials have taken some important steps to work toward solutions to this problem. But there is more that the County can do, and County Commissioners can play a key role by seeking opportunities to fund pretrial services programs and supporting reforms by the Sheriff's Department and the courts.

- 1. One way to prevent the harm of pretrial incarceration and to combat mass incarceration is to avoid booking people into the jail in the first place. Law enforcement officers have the discretion to issue a citation (a ticket with a court date) instead of arresting someone. This policy has been successfully implemented in other counties for certain lower-level charges. Issuing more citations will prevent harmful pretrial incarceration, reduce costly jail overcrowding, and save law enforcement time and money.**

As a county commissioner, would you support the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Department's expanded use of citations instead of arrest warrants for lower-level charges?

Response (Please give a clear "yes" or "no" and any explanation):

Yes; as the next District 3 Mecklenburg County Commissioner, I will support the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Department's expanded use of citations instead of arrest warrants for

lower-level charges. This is a severe problem across the country, but especially for Mecklenburg County. Although the institution strives to make everyone believe that people are being held to keep the community safe, we are only harming communities of color and people of lower socioeconomic status. We must continue to provide funding to the Sheriff's Department and advocate for citations for lower level offenses rather than arrests. If we as a county are going to take mass incarceration, discrimination, and police predation seriously, we must actively work to end harmful pretrial incarceration. We must also guarantee adequate implicit bias training for all law enforcement officers and advocate for officer discretion to issue citations rather than arrests. Through implicit bias and equity training, law enforcement officers are more likely to issue citations and avoid arresting people of color and those of low socioeconomic status.

- 2. Pretrial services programs are a key part of successful policies to keep people out of jail before their day in court and to help people get to their court dates. These programs range from basic supports such as court date reminders, court-based child care, and transportation vouchers, to programs such as mental health and substance use treatment and no-fee electronic monitoring.**

As a county commissioner, would you commit to supporting pretrial services, and seek funding to expand pretrial services in your county?

Response (Please give a clear "yes" or "no" and any explanation):

Yes; as the District 3 County Commissioner, I will commit to supporting pretrial services and seek funding to expand pretrial services in Mecklenburg County. Without funding pretrial services, we are feeding into the systemic injustices that perpetrate mass incarceration and the predatory challenges faced by communities of color and those of lower socioeconomic status. As stated in the question, pretrial services programs are practical solutions for providing assistance and support to individuals awaiting trial. Court date reminders, child care, transportation, mental health programs, and no-fee electronic monitoring are simple and effective ways to support those awaiting trial. I am dedicated to reforming and expanding our pretrial services programs to guarantee equity, accountability, and respect in the criminal justice system.

- 3. Pretrial services programs work hand-in-hand with court-system reforms to prevent the harms that come with requiring payment of secured money bonds in order to be released. In Mecklenburg County, judges, magistrates, and the district attorney's office have made the first of many steps needed to implement meaningful reforms to the pretrial system.**

As a county commissioner, will you encourage and support the pretrial reform efforts of the court-system actors in your county, and seek funding to facilitate those reforms where relevant?

Response (Please give a clear “yes” or “no” and any explanation):

Yes; as the next District 3 County Commissioner, I will encourage and support the pretrial reform efforts and seek funding to facilitate such reforms. As problematic as our inequitable capitalist system is, money is necessary to provide equity and accountability in the court and criminal justice system. In the court system, it has been pay-to-play for far too long. We must support organizations, advocacy groups, and activists to reform pretrial services programs, provide funding, and work with the court system to eliminate cash bonds. I am dedicated to working with the community to guarantee steps to end mass incarceration and predatory criminal justice practices in Mecklenburg County.