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SCARLETT A. WILSON
Solicitor, Ninth Judicial Circuit

July 29, 2026

Chief Ron Camacho
2500 City Hall Lane
North Charleston, SC 29406

RE: North Charleston Police Department Investigations

Dear Chief Camacho,

I am writing to raise concerns that my team has with North Charleston Police Department cases, from patrol arrests to detectives' investigations. These concerns are not offered after a handful of sporadic complaints, but upon a series of ongoing concerns that lead me to believe there are pervasive issues within your agency. I read with great interest the news reports that crime in North Charleston has declined while arrests have risen. The reports go on to describe NCPD's touting the fact that more crimes are being solved by arrest. Obviously, arrests are important for public safety in the short term. In the long term, however, arrests without successful prosecutions are hollow victories. Arrests do not solve crimes, convictions do.

You will recall that my Senior Litigator, North Charleston Team Leader and I met with you and Associate Chief Scott Perry over six months ago to make you aware of problems we were experiencing. My team has also addressed these issues numerous times with supervisors in your Department. Unfortunately, we have not seen improvement. We do not have these issues with other agencies on the scale that we see with NCPD. When prosecutors who have previously only worked with other agencies handle an NCPD case, they are often stunned by the insufficiency of the evidence and the lack of invested investigators. Assistant Chief Perry is a tremendous asset for you, but he cannot troubleshoot NCPD's way through these problems. He cannot make these department wide corrections himself (and he will be retired by the end of the year).

A common refrain when we request additional information or investigation from your Department is, "You have investigators. Get them to do it." While it is true that my office has a small team of investigators, they help marshal cases to trial for the thousands of arrests that are made by the hundreds of law enforcement officers who serve this Circuit. We are not equipped to conduct pro-active investigations that should have been complete before they reached us. We do not have the resources to gather the basic information that you should be collecting.

A. Obligations to Complete and Continue Investigations

The patrol division of any agency is often first to respond to most crime scenes. They conduct immediate assessments of crimes and do preliminary investigations. Many times, patrol makes an arrest on scene. An arrest does not end an investigation. Many times, an arrest should signal the start of an investigation, not the conclusion. It appears that detectives only review uncharged incidents when patrol does not make an arrest, thus detective designation for follow-up seems rare. As your team has acknowledged, patrol officers rarely have the training or experience to lead investigations. They do not have consistent guidance on available investigative avenues to pursue. The result is a lack of thoroughness in the investigation underlying arrests. (*See 2025-* [redacted] *2026-* [redacted]*, 2025-* [redacted]*, 2025-* [redacted]*, 2026-* [redacted]*)*

Recently, an individual was arrested by the patrol division on a charge for Attempted Murder. When my office began requesting the evidence, patrol advised the case was elevated to detectives. When my office then attempted a follow-up with detectives, Detective supervisors advised that no investigation was completed at their level because patrol initiated the arrest. Therefore, crucial video evidence was not retrieved and the delay caused it to be irretrievable. The same pattern is repeated in many cases, causing us to lack previously available surveillance video and other evidence.

We see patrol officers are at times requested by detective supervisors to complete follow-up instead of handling the follow-up within the detective division. As recently as the last few weeks, prosecutors contacted both responding patrol officers and detectives regarding issues. There was minimal response with no ownership or initiative taken. There is obvious confusion on how to process and investigate crime scenes. Too often, violent crimes have zero witness follow-up, zero victim follow-up and zero search of the crime scene location. (*See 2026-* [redacted]*)*

There appears to be a pervasive problem in your department with failure to document and follow up from the initial report; this is illustrated from the recent child death failures, and continues to be illustrated in *2026-* [redacted]*,* as referenced above, and *2026-* [redacted]*.* I am left wondering whether patrol officers and detectives are being trained on how to respond to an incident, document the incident, preserve evidence and follow-up on necessary evidence for successful prosecution.

This confusion of responsibilities prevents my office from receiving evidence necessary for successful prosecution. It appears that responsibilities are often being abandoned or shifted from one division, without communication, to the division upon which they are being shifted. Our office also receives conflicting information as to who should complete follow-up. It is unclear as to who bears the responsibility for follow-up interviews and evidence collection.

Recently in the [redacted] trial, the judge *properly* gave the jury an "adverse inference" instruction regarding evidence your Department lost (*See 2022-*[redacted]). The Judge found that North Charleston officers failed to preserve body worn camera footage, witness statements, and photographic lineups. Specifically, the Judge instructed the jury when evidence is lost or destroyed by the State you may infer that the evidence which was lost or destroyed would have been adverse to the State's case. This instruction is set to become commonplace with your cases if the poor casework is not remedied.

B. Communications on Cases, Case Outcomes

After an investigation and arrest by your agency, my office is tasked with prosecuting the case. We rely on complete casefiles, law enforcement input, and victim input in resolving cases. When an officer or detective advises the defense attorney that a case does not matter, should be dismissed, should be drastically reduced, or otherwise comments on their perception of a reasonable outcome, my prosecutors are placed in a precarious position. This can cause unnecessary hurdles in the resolution of cases. Of course, we are transparent with the defense about exculpatory evidence. We have no consternation with your Department sharing exculpatory information. What I am describing, however, is the situation where my prosecutors are negotiating cases against the defense bar *and* your officers when your officers do not know the whole case. Arrest decisions are exclusively yours. Prosecution decisions are exclusively mine. For both types of decisions, communication and collaboration are key. Your officers should not be offering resolutions without the input and approval of the prosecutor handling the case. (*See 2026-*[redacted] *2025-*[redacted] *2023-*[redacted])

Further, your Detectives recently encountered a Defendant who was on bond for Murder attempting to obstruct justice *in your lobby*. Despite speaking with this Defendant for nearly an hour, Detectives did not record or document the encounter, nor did they inform my prosecutors. We learned of the conversation only by chance. The interaction was documented only after we learned about it and confronted your Detectives. (*See 2021-*[redacted])

While reviewing body-worn camera footage, we hear officers talk about how they are certain their charges will be reduced, or defendants will be given light sentences by my prosecutors. (*See 2026-*[redacted] *discussing 2026-*[redacted]) Without question, we negotiate outcomes. But the reason this happens is often due to the lack of evidence your Department has brought to us. Furthermore, the practice of unprepared detectives testifying at preliminary hearings creates an unfortunate and sometimes inaccurate record. This can create devastating impeachment for your detectives at trial which forces us to make concessions. (*See 2024-*[redacted]) Another pervasive problem is that surveillance video is not obtained when witnesses clearly state that they have cameras that covered the violent attack. (See *2026-*[redacted]) By the time my office is involved, such video footage may be deleted or overwritten.

C. Failure to Provide Discovery

South Carolina Rules of Criminal Procedure 5(a)(1)(C) outlines our collective duties of criminal discovery." My office has 30 days to respond to these requests. In addition, the Chief Justice's Docket Management Order places additional responsibilities on my office *and remedies* when your Department is not complying with the Rules or the Order. We cannot and will not chase down your discovery any longer. To do so is to enable your Department to shirk its responsibilities. Your obligations exist for *every* General Sessions or Family Court arrest on *every* single charge. We should not have to ask for what you already know you are required by law to provide.

Time and time again, my office is requesting initial case files at the 30-day point in a case's procedural history. Notwithstanding the initial delays, in nearly all detective division cases my prosecutors are required to manually review your agency's case files because we cannot trust we have a complete file. Further, when discovery is noted to be missing, it is a process of endurance to acquire the material needed. In *2022-*[redacted], requests have been made since February for a signed search warrant return, and we still do not possess the material. Another extreme example of this failure to provide discovery is *2024-*[redacted] where case agent notes have not yet been completed on a year-old homicide. Additionally, while you have designated someone to ensure that body camera footage is uploaded on the patrol side, we are unaware of any safeguards to ensure that body camera footage is saved when the detective division handles a case.

While we appreciate the overall efforts by your Department, we cannot successfully prosecute your cases with the current quality of casework. Poor investigations inevitably lead to poor outcomes. We are all called to serve our community, and accountability and expectations must be raised in order for my team to take your agency's cases to a jury and achieve justice. I understand that some of these anecdotes involve investigations preceding your tenure. Our issues with follow-up and discovery, however, are current.

I bring the above examples to your attention as a sampling of what appears to be the standard. I would like to discuss these and other matters with you further. Despite the harsh realities highlighted in this letter, we want to work with you. We want to help you improve. We want to work as a team. Moving forward, however, if investigations do not improve dramatically, you will see many more dismissals and remands for further investigation. The status quo is not sustainable.

Sincerely,

Scarlett A. Wilson
Ninth Circuit Solicitor