

## Clerks of Superior Court Go to Prison (for a Tour)

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Last week, a group of clerks of superior court visited the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women and the Combined Records section of the Department of Public Safety. The tours were part of one-day educational program offered through the North Carolina Judicial College.

Last week's class was actually the second offering of this particular program. The first time we offered it, last September, it was for a mixed group of superior court judges, district court judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, and clerks. We had far more applicants than spaces. There were so many clerks who applied that I decided to offer another iteration of the class just for them.

We began the day with a visit to the [North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women](#) in Raleigh. NCCIW is, as the name implies, the state's primary prison facility for women. Over half of North Carolina's 2,900 female inmates are there. [Eastern Correctional Institution](#), [Southern](#), and [Swannanoa](#) also house women, but NCCIW is the state's only prison diagnostic facility for women. In other words, every woman sentenced to prison starts her sentence at NCCIW. The three women on death row are housed there, too.

Our tour focused largely on the jobs women do in prison. For example, we visited the dental lab, where inmates make dentures and other dental appliances for other state prisoners, and the cosmetology program, where inmates can learn to color and cut hair. Prison officials are aware of the employment challenges felons face upon release, and they seek to offer training and apprenticeships in fields where they won't face insurmountable certification and licensure barriers. See [C-CAT](#).

NCCIW also has several inmate employment opportunities through Correction Enterprises. Correction Enterprises is a receipt-funded branch of the Department of Public Safety that uses inmate labor to produce goods and services for various state and local entities. Inmates who work in Enterprises jobs make more money (up to \$3 per day) than other inmates (\$1 per day). [G.S. 148-18](#). We visited the license tag plant, which makes the 3 million vehicle license tags distributed in North Carolina each year, and the Quick Copy Center, which does digital printing, bindery, and framing and matting.

(By the way, did you know that under G.S. 148-132, state and local government employees and retirees are allowed to purchase up to \$2,500 worth of merchandise or services from Correction Enterprises every calendar year for their personal use? Popular items—available through the [Correction Enterprises](#) website—include furniture, fire pits, and eyeglasses.)

We learned that for all inmate jobs (Enterprises and otherwise), the women are awarded Earned Time credit—generally at the rate of 9 days per month—that allows them to work their way down toward their minimum sentence.

Our group had a short question and answer session with two inmates, the first one nearing the end of a long term-of-years sentence, and the second only a few years into a life sentence. The first inmate is a mother of three whose third child was born shortly after she began serving her sentence. She talked about how her children had been able to come see her at the prison's MATCH ([Mothers and Their Children](#)) center, where inmates can occasionally visit with and

cook for their families in an apartment-like setting.

In the afternoon, we left the prison and went to the Division of Adult Correction's enormous administrative building on Yonkers Road in North Raleigh. There, we met with the staff of DAC's Combined Records section—the office that audits criminal judgments and sends some of them back to the courts for clarification and correction, as described [here](#). We learned more about their work and toured their workspace. It was good to see some of the clerks and Combined Records staff who had spoken to one another countless times over the phone get to meet in person for the first time.

Finally, we spent some time reviewing a sampling of actual judgments recently returned to the courts for clarification. We tried to highlight some of the more common errors and omissions—everything from missing signatures and seals to incorrect minimum and maximum terms—in the hope that similar issues might be avoided in the future.

In general, I prefer to offer classes to a multidisciplinary group whenever possible. I find that course participants with different jobs learn a lot from one another when they come to School of Government programs—probably more than they ever learn from me. In this case, though, I'm glad we decided to offer a version of this program exclusively for clerks. I was pleased to facilitate an opportunity for the clerks to see with their own eyes what happens to all those judgments they prepare, as well as what happens because of them. One of the assistant clerks said it best in her application to the program: "All the years of typing judgments it would be neat to see and understand what actually happens to the inmate." I couldn't agree more.

I want to thank the leadership at NCCIW and Combined Records for their enthusiastic support of the program. And we once again had far more applicants than spaces, so I hope to be able to offer the class again in the future.