

News Roundup

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Nationally, the focus this week was on the sentencing of Ariel Castro, the Cleveland man who imprisoned three women in his home for years and sexually assaulted them. Castro spoke on his own behalf, stating that he “is not a violent person” but is simply “sick,” and claiming that he and his captives lived in “harmony.” While Castro’s self-serving remarks left many observers disgusted, the testimony of a psychologist who has worked with the victims left many inspired. He described how the women helped one another during the dark days of their captivity. Michelle Knight, the oldest and longest-held victim, often “placed herself in between Castro and [a younger victim], taking on physical and sexual abuse herself to protect her friend.” Castro received a sentence of life without parole plus 1000 years, and I suspect that his time in prison may be difficult.

In other news:

Change in Public Defender Selection Procedure. Among the items tucked into the budget was a change in how public defenders are selected. Formerly chosen by IDS, they will now be picked by the senior resident superior court judge, notes the [Greensboro News and Record](#).

Possible Change in Judicial Selection Procedure. [S 321](#), passed by the General Assembly and awaiting the Governor’s signature, would change the way that vacant district court judgeships are filled. Under current law, the local bar chooses three candidates and the Governor selects one of those. Under the bill, the local bar would choose five candidates, but the Governor would not be bound to choose any of them. The legislation generally passed along party lines. The *News and Observer* covers the story [here](#).

Upcoming IDS/School of Government Training. Registration for the 2013 New Misdemeanor Defender Training, cosponsored by the School of Government and the Office of Indigent Defense Services, is now open and available at www.sog.unc.edu/node/1325. The title pretty well describes the focus of the course, which offers 22 hours of CLE credit and costs \$455 for non-IDS employees. The course runs from Tuesday, September 17 through Friday, September 20 at the School of Government.

Justice Ginsburg Can Beat You Up. Sure she’s 80, with 20 years on the Court, and appears frail. But after you read [this USA Today profile](#) of Justice Ginsburg, you will realize that she is smarter than you, tougher than you, and could take you down. Not only has she beaten cancer twice, she can she crank out 20 standard push-ups, and she regularly works past 2:00 a.m. “I think now I am the hardest-working justice,” she says, and it’s hard to argue.

Ankle Bracelets Not a Panacea. [This AP story](#) states that “electronic ankle bracelets used to track an offender’s whereabouts have proliferated so much that officials are struggling to handle an avalanche of monitoring alerts that are often nothing more sinister than a dead battery, lost satellite contact or someone arriving home late from work. Amid all that white noise, alarms are going unchecked, sometimes on defendants now accused of new crimes.” Data collected by the AP suggest that a typical bracelet alerts about 10 times per month, and that officers assigned to monitor the alarms are stretched thin. I would be interested in readers’ thoughts and experiences about how monitoring is working in North Carolina.

Astonishing Bar Passage Rate. Finally, a story with no North Carolina angle at all. Miles Law School in Alabama is a small, unaccredited, night law school. So one might expect a lower-than-average bar passage rate . . . but [this ABC News story](#) reveals that its passage rate in 2012 was a mere 8.6%, with just three of thirty-five graduates passing the examination. That's actually a big step *up* from 2011, when the school went 0-for-26. The school's dean responds that the value of the program cannot be measured "only with empirical or statistical information" and that the school teaches students "black leather law."