

News Roundup

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It's a bird, it's a plane . . . no, it's a drone over the skies of North Carolina. And soon it may be operated by law enforcement. The News and Observer [reports](#) that the General Assembly is poised to enact [S 446](#), which flew through the House yesterday and has been returned to the Senate for concurrence with relatively minor amendments. The bill repeals [the prohibition on governmental use of unmanned aircraft](#) enacted in 2013 and authorizes the State's Chief Information Officer to approve the procurement and operation of unmanned aircraft systems by State agencies and local governments.

In other news:

“Bail makes poor people who would otherwise win their cases plead guilty,” according to [this](#) recent article in the New York Times Magazine. The article reports that of the nearly 200 defendants bailed out in New York City through a citywide fund to post bail for low-level offenders, 96 percent made every court appearance, and more than half had their charges dismissed. By comparison, defendants held on bail for the duration of their cases were convicted 92 percent of the time. Advocates for bail reform say such funds are simply a band-aid for a system in need of greater change, specifically, the elimination of cash bail.

Prisoner and civil rights groups have asked the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate solitary confinement practices in North Carolina's prisons. The News and Observer [reports](#) that advocacy groups delivered a 15-page letter on Monday to the DOJ's Office of Civil Rights, which included the story of the [2014 death of inmate Michael Kerr](#), a 53-year-old veteran suffering from mental illness who died of dehydration after spending more than a month in solitary confinement in Alexander Correctional Institution. Kerr spent the five days before his death handcuffed and barely moving in his isolation cell. WRAL [reports](#) that while state prison officials have themselves called for reforms, the advocates say more is needed. You can read the letter [here](#).

Connecticut Supreme Court strikes down what remains of its death penalty. The Connecticut legislature prospectively repealed its death penalty in 2012, but permitted death sentences for capital felonies committed before April 25, 2012. Yesterday, the Connecticut Supreme Court held in a 4-3 decision in [State v. Santiago](#) that “following its prospective abolition, this state's death penalty no longer comports with contemporary standards of decency and no longer serves any legitimate penological purpose.” The court determined that “execution of those offenders who committed capital felonies prior to April 25, 2012, would violate the state constitutional prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment.”

Woman complains of humiliating roadside body cavity search by sheriff's deputies in Texas. Twenty-one year-old Charnesia Corley was driving to the store in June when she was stopped by a Harris County, Texas sheriff's deputy for running a stop sign. The officer who stopped her said he smelled marijuana. After failing to turn up drugs in a search of Corley's car, he called a female deputy to search Corley in the parking lot of the gas station where she had stopped. [Corley said](#) the officer told her to pull her pants down, ordered her to open her legs, and reached her hands inside Corley's body. Corley [has filed a complaint](#) alleging that the officers sexually assaulted her. A sheriff's department spokesman [reportedly said](#) the deputies did everything as they should. [Some disagree](#) with that assessment.

Clowns aren't funny in small towns after midnight. It is safe to travel to Hickory again now that the alleged ax-wielding clown about town [has turned himself in](#) to police. Authorities [issued a warrant last Friday](#) for the man's arrest after he allegedly swung an ax at a woman while wearing a clown mask and a multicolored wig. The woman reportedly escaped unharmed, but I have no idea how she can avoid recurring dreams of [it](#).