

News Roundup

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As the New York Times [reports](#), the sentencing phase of Dylann Roof's federal death penalty trial began this week following his December conviction on thirty-three charges arising from murdering nine people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof is representing himself during this phase of the trial. In a brief opening statement, Roof repeatedly told jurors that he was not mentally ill. In what is described as a "white supremacist manifesto" disclosed during the prosecution's opening statement, Roof wrote that he did not regret his actions and had "not shed a tear for the innocent people I killed." An [opinion piece](#) from NBC News argues that Roof "has a constitutional right not to try to spare his own life." Keep reading for more news.

Raise the Age Discussion. Tune into "You Don't Say" hosted by Rick and Donna Martinez on [News Radio 680 WPTF](#) this morning at 9:15 to hear a panel discussion about raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction in North Carolina. Jessica Smith is on the panel and has been involved in a [proposal to raise](#) the age in North Carolina through her work as the reporter for the Criminal Committee of the [North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice](#). If you miss the live broadcast, you can find a podcast of the show [here](#).

Rolesville School Slam. The News & Observer [reports](#) that a Twitter video showing a school resource officer assigned to Rolesville High School, Ruben De Los Santos, "slamming a female student to the floor" received national attention this week. It appears that De Los Santos was responding to a fight between students at the time of the incident. In a message to parents, Rolesville High Principal Dhedra Lassiter said that the incident has caused the school district and law enforcement to review the agreement that governs school resource officers in Wake County schools.

Charlotte School of Law. The Charlotte Observer reports that Charlotte School of Law, already on [probation imposed by the ABA](#), is in crisis after [losing access to federal student loans](#). The school will not be admitting new students in January, and it is unclear whether classes will resume on schedule for the spring semester. School leaders reportedly are working on a plan that would allow students to transfer to Florida Coastal School of Law. Like Charlotte School of Law, Florida Coastal is operated by InfiLaw. At the time of writing, the Observer was [reporting](#) that student leaders were scheduled to meet with school administrators "to press demands for a waiver of tuition for the upcoming semester and more straight answers on how the school is addressing longstanding problems."

Offender Victim Reconciliation. The New York Times has a [short article](#) describing one family's experience with a Kansas prison project where crime victims and their families are able to meet the offender who caused them harm. The article tells the story of a mother and father who meet the young man who killed their son in a drunk driving crash.

Federal Criminal Justice Reform. Politico [reports](#) that Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley says that he and Senator Dick Durbin plan to again push for criminal justice reform in 2017 after their efforts stalled last year. Grassley and Durbin were the chief authors of a reform bill that received bipartisan support from committee members in 2016 but never made it to the Senate floor. According to the report, the two major components of the bill are changes to mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent crimes and "changes to the prison system aimed at reducing recidivism rates."

With his term in office coming to a close, President Obama has [published an article](#) in the Harvard Law review titled

“The President’s Role in Advancing Criminal Justice Reform.” In the article, Obama praises the bipartisan efforts of the Judiciary Committee. Obama also notes, as has the News Roundup on many occasions, that he has used his clemency power aggressively, that opioid abuse is a national public health issue, and that the scientific validity of forensic techniques is an issue of concern.