

## News Roundup

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**Categories :** [Uncategorized](#)

**Date :** May 31, 2019

Late last week a federal judge in Raleigh vacated Charles Ray Finch's 1976 state conviction for murder and ordered that he be [released from North Carolina prison](#) after being incarcerated for 43 years for a killing that he did not commit. Finch is a client of the Wrongful Convictions Clinic at Duke Law School and Professor James Coleman Jr., the clinic's co-director, served as his lead counsel. When Finch was convicted, he received a mandatory death sentence. That sentence was commuted to life without parole after the mandatory death penalty statute was held unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Woodson v. North Carolina*. Keep reading for more information about Finch's case and other news.

**Finch.** Back in January, the Fourth Circuit [reversed](#) the United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina's finding that Finch did not meet the actual innocence standard required to overcome the untimeliness of a habeas petition filed in that court, remanding the case for a hearing on the merits of the petition. [This post](#) from Duke Law discusses the Fourth Circuit's analysis of the issues in Finch's case, including an impermissibly suggestive lineup and credibility problems with witnesses. [This article](#) from the Wilson Times discusses Finch's reunification with his family following his release.

**School Safety Tip Line.** WRAL reports that North Carolina Superintendent Mark Johnson announced this week that North Carolina is partnering with Sandy Hook Promise to provide a statewide tip line that people can use to anonymously report school safety issues at middle and high schools in the state. Called the "Say Something Anonymous Reporting System," the system will launch during the upcoming 2019-20 school year. The [website](#) for the system indicates that the tip line can be accessed from a computer, by telephone, or from a mobile app. A crisis center that is staffed 24/7 manages the tip line. Sandy Hook Promise is a nonprofit organization based in Newtown, Connecticut, the site of the tragic Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012.

**Teaching Award Nominations.** We know that many readers of this blog also are clients of the School of Government and have attended CLE's or other instructional events at the school. We would like to invite you to nominate a School of Government faculty member for the Albert and Gladys Hall Coates Term Professorship for Teaching Excellence. Established in 1998, the award honors a faculty member who has gone above and beyond in educating North Carolina's public officials. More information about the award can be found [here](#); the deadline for nominations is June 14.

**Summer Webinar.** Speaking of teaching, I've got news for you – the [2019 Summer Criminal Law Webinar is next Friday, June 7, at 1:30pm](#). Folks, this webinar has got it all. It will cover recent criminal law decisions from the North Carolina appellate courts and the U.S. Supreme Court. It will highlight recently enacted North Carolina criminal law legislation. John Rubin and Phil Dixon Jr. will discuss a wide range of issues affecting criminal cases in North Carolina courts. If that's not enough, you can even ask questions online in real time. Hit the link, sign up, and get yourself 1.5 hours of CLE credit.

**Pendergrass Passes.** As the News of Orange County [reports](#), former Orange County Sheriff Lindy Pendergrass passed away last week at the age of 85. Pendergrass served as the Sheriff of Orange County for 32 years, from 1982 until 2014. Prior to becoming Sheriff, Pendergrass worked for 25 years with the Chapel Hill Police Department. As an indication of changing times, the News of Orange report says that when Pendergrass was sworn in as Sheriff, there

was only one roadworthy patrol car in the department, which officers left at the office at the end of a shift so that it could be used by the next shift of officers. Pendergrass immediately set to expanding the fleet.