



MECKLENBURG COUNTY SHERIFF

GARRY L. MCFADDEN

*Working to influence change by being...
“the difference”*



Sheriff McFadden Emphasizes Importance of Mental Health Following Fatal Stabbing of Ukrainian Refugee

(CHARLOTTE, N.C.) — The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) extends its deepest condolences to 23-year-old Iryna Zarutskia's family, friends, and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time.

While MCSO was not the responding agency at the scene nor are we involved in the ongoing criminal investigation, I want to continue addressing the broader questions this incident has raised regarding mental health, homelessness, and poverty. Decarlos Brown's extensive history, including numerous prior arrests and his life on the streets, highlights the challenges our community faces in balancing public safety with addressing mental health needs within the justice system.

In 2019, I established the state's first dedicated mental health unit at the Mecklenburg County Detention Center. The unit began with 28 beds for men, offering therapy, medication, and structured programming. In 2020, the program expanded to include women, further demonstrating MCSO's leadership in correctional mental healthcare. Two years later, my agency created the Restoring Individuals Safely and Effectively (RISE) initiative, which launched in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and Recovery Solutions. Under RISE, MCSO is able to provide comprehensive psychiatric care, therapy, medication management, and competency restoration services for individuals deemed incapable of proceeding to trial due to mental illness.

Since its inception, the RISE program has served at least 56 residents, helping nearly 80 percent restore or maintain the capacity to stand trial. In 2025, MCSO expanded RISE from 10 to 25 beds, enabling our agency to serve even more individuals in Mecklenburg County and at least 36 other counties in the Western District of North Carolina.

For years, our Community Engagement team has gone above and beyond to address homelessness, poverty, and mental health by providing beds and bookbags to families in need, creating unforgettable free summer camps, and supporting students' emotional well-being and guiding them through conflict resolution.

This work represents our ongoing commitment to address mental health, which ultimately improves public safety. Brown's instability kept him from living at home with his family. He's had a history of mental illness. His mother was at wit's end. Without taking action, we can't expect crime rates to decrease, we can't expect recidivism rates to go down and we'll continue to see violence. It's a vicious cycle, which is why mental health matters so much to me and my agency. But we must also acknowledge that more must be done at every level of government. Regardless, we will continue to do our part to improve mental health services for individuals in our custody, reduce repeat offenses, and enhance safety for our entire community.

Additionally, I am deeply concerned by how Zarutskia's death has been portrayed in both local and national media. Politics aside, as law enforcement, it is our responsibility to protect all members of our community, citizens and residents alike. Every life has value, and every victim of violence should be treated with the same seriousness and respect, regardless of background. While the current administration has placed significant focus on protecting residents from violent criminals, I question why our immigrant community does not always receive the same attention and support, especially as many are living in fear everyday of being detained or even losing their lives.

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