



## Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

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Irwin H. Carmichael  
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Chief Deputy Sheriff

January 19, 2018

Dear Charlotte Observer Editorial Board,

As Mecklenburg County Sheriff, I carefully consider every single decision I make. When I decided to implement video visitation technology in our jails, it was a decision I did not enter into lightly. In response to a recent opinion piece in the Charlotte Observer, I think it's important to understand and explain how video visitation actually works at the Mecklenburg County Jails. I'd like to start with the notion that we make a profit from video visitation. That is not true. The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) does not receive any funds (profit or revenue) from the contract with GTL as it relates to video visitation.

Prior to moving to video visitation in October of 2016, MCSO allowed in-person visits where each inmate was allowed one visit per week unless it was a visit from an attorney, clergy or professional service provider. With in-person visits, each inmate was allowed one (free) visit each week. With video visitation, each inmate is still allowed one (free) visit each week. Costs are only a factor if an inmate's family or friends would like additional visits, *an option not available prior to video visitation*. Despite what the writer purports, many have taken advantage of the conveniences that video visitation offers because they want to see and talk to their loved ones more frequently. In the year prior to video visitation, between October 2015 and September 2016, the Mecklenburg County Jails saw approximately 18,710 visits. Since video visitation was implemented, there has been a 25.9% increase in the number of visits. From October 2016 to October 2017, there were approximately 23,562 visits using video visitation. I think the numbers speak for themselves.

With in-person visits, there were a number of security procedures in place because we had to physically move inmates from one part of the facility to another. This was staff intensive and limited visitation to one specific day of the week determined by housing units. Again, with all of those logistics, each inmate could only receive one visit per week on a specific day for that assigned housing unit. When an inmate's housing unit changed, so did their specified visitation day.

With video visitation technology, we have enhanced the security of our detention operations because of less inmate movement and we have expanded video visitation hours from 8-11am; 1-4pm; and 8-10pm seven days a week regardless of the facility or housing unit allowing families to schedule visits convenient for them. Visitation is no longer restricted to housing units and inmates can receive visits on any day during the allotted times.

The argument that women who don't receive financial support may not be able to see their child is a stretch. If we once again compare the old system to the current system, female inmates just like male inmates have always been allowed to receive one (free) visit each week. Under video visitation, they may actually be able to see their child more often if they or their family chooses to purchase time outside of the free video visit allowed each week.

The writer mentions the free platforms like FaceTime and Skype which are personal services offered with little security. We operate fully accredited detention facilities and to think that we would haphazardly deploy this type of technology in our facilities would be irresponsible. The GTL video visitation platform is not FaceTime or Skype; this is a technology with multiple features and layers of security designed by professionals who understand the needs of our industry and meet our stringent security requirements.

Video visitation was deployed more than 14 months ago in 2016. According to the writer, Mr. Romain, he has been "visiting clients in the Mecklenburg County Jail for the past 10 years." There were press releases and notifications posted throughout the jail as we prepared to deploy this technology. I find the timing of his protest against video visitation questionable and his opinion rooted in little fact and extremely misleading.

As the elected Sheriff of Mecklenburg County, I have a responsibility to all of the citizens of this great county. To imply or opine that my decision to implement video visitation is an attempt to exploit poor people or to take away one of our most basic human needs is an outright falsehood. To the contrary, this program has increased access to loved ones and it has increased their opportunities to visit while also increasing the safety and security of our facilities, and inmates and staff alike at no cost to taxpayers.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Irwin Carmichael". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Irwin" and last name "Carmichael" clearly distinguishable.

Irwin Carmichael, Sheriff  
Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office