

All Things Judicial Features Interview with Former Chief Public Defender Wallace C. Harrelson



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Date 2023-06-21 11:18

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 21, 2023

All Things Judicial Features Interview with Former Chief Public Defender Wallace C. Harrelson

Harrelson was North Carolina's first and longest-serving public defender.

RALEIGH — The latest episode of [All Things Judicial](#) features excerpts of an interview with former Judicial District 18 ([Guilford County](#)) Chief Public Defender Wallace C. Harrelson. He has the distinction of serving as North Carolina's first and longest serving public defender. The interview was recorded in 2008 as part of the [Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism's Historical Video Series](#) and was conducted by former Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Douglas Albright. In the interview, Harrelson shares how he chose the law as a profession, the implementation of North Carolina's public defender system, and the details of one of his most memorable cases.



"(Public defenders) had to set a standard of representation that showed that you were doing what the office was set up to do—providing the best representation possible," said Harrelson on the podcast. "It took a period of time to convince all the parties that the public defender program was what was needed to be spread throughout the state."

Wallace "Wally" Harrelson was born in Cherryville, North Carolina, and graduated from Duke University with an undergraduate degree in political science. Harrelson attended Duke University School of Law and graduated in 1962. He served as a prosecutor in Guilford County and then worked in private practice until his appointment by Governor Bob Scott in 1970 as the first Chief Public Defender in the state. He served in that role for his entire career until his death in 2011. His tenure as Chief Public Defender in Judicial District 18 lasted over 40 years and spanned the terms of seven governors and five local senior resident chief superior court judges. The full video interview with Harrelson can be found on the [North Carolina Judicial Branch YouTube channel](#).

MORE INFORMATION

All Things Judicial is a podcast about the important role of the North Carolina Judicial Branch in state government. The podcast follows a bi-monthly release schedule with each new episode available for download every other Wednesday and can be found on all podcast apps and on [NCCourts.gov](#).

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About North Carolina Judicial Branch

The [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#) is an equal and distinctively separate branch and core function of government. More than 7,000 Judicial Branch employees statewide administer justice in courthouses in North Carolina's 100 counties. The [Judicial Branch budget for FY 2021–22](#) was \$672.4M, 86.2% of which is used to pay salaries and the remaining 13.8% is used for operations. The Judicial Branch receives only 2.59% of the overall State budget.

About North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts

The North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (NCAOC) is the administrative agency for the [North Carolina Judicial Branch](#), providing administrative services to help the North Carolina court system operate more efficiently and effectively, taking into account each courthouse's diverse needs, caseloads, and available resources.

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