



BUZZARD
— LAW FIRM —

FREE GUIDE · FEDERAL CASES

Facing Federal Charges in *North Carolina*

How federal cases differ from state cases, what to do if agents contact you, and how sentencing and detention work in federal court.

Buzzard Law Firm
728 S. Main St., Lillington, NC

910-893-2900
Admitted in all 3 NC federal districts

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

Federal court is a different world.

Federal cases are investigated by agencies like the FBI, DEA, ATF and IRS, and prosecuted by U.S. Attorneys with significant resources. They often build for months before anyone is charged. Penalties can be much heavier than in state court, and there is no parole.

Many local lawyers aren't admitted to practice in federal court. If you learn you're under investigation, or you've been charged, the experience of your lawyer in that system matters.

Federal court at a glance

3 districts

North Carolina has the Eastern, Middle and Western Districts. Harnett County is in the Eastern District.

Detention

A judge decides at a detention hearing whether you're released before trial and on what conditions. 18 U.S.C. § 3142

70 days

is the general Speedy Trial Act deadline for trial after indictment or first appearance, with many exclusions. 18 U.S.C. § 3161

No parole

Federal prison sentences are served with limited good-conduct credit. 18 U.S.C. § 3624(b)

IF AGENTS CONTACT YOU

What to do before any charge

- ☐ **Be polite, but don't answer questions** without a lawyer. You can say, "I want to speak with a lawyer before answering any questions."
- ☐ **Never lie to a federal agent.** A false statement can be its own federal crime, even if you're never charged with anything else. 18 U.S.C. § 1001
- ☐ **Don't destroy or change documents,** phones or files. That can be obstruction.
- ☐ **If you receive a target letter or grand jury subpoena,** call a lawyer right away. There may be a short window to act.
- ☐ **Don't talk about the investigation** with coworkers, friends or others who may be witnesses.

THE PROCESS

How a federal case usually moves

- 1 **Investigation.** Agents gather evidence, often with search warrants, subpoenas and cooperating witnesses.
- 2 **Charge.** Felonies are usually charged by a grand jury indictment, sometimes after a complaint and arrest.
- 3 **Initial appearance and detention.** A magistrate judge advises you of the charges and decides release or detention.
- 4 **Discovery and motions.** Your lawyer reviews the government's evidence and challenges what can be challenged.
- 5 **Plea or trial.** Most federal cases resolve by plea agreement; others go to a jury trial.
- 6 **Sentencing.** A probation officer prepares a presentence report, and the judge sentences after considering the Guidelines.

SENTENCING

How federal sentences are set

- **The Sentencing Guidelines** calculate a range from the offense and your criminal history. They are advisory, but judges must consider them.
- **Mandatory minimums** apply to some offenses, including many drug trafficking and firearm charges.
21 U.S.C. § 841
- **Relevant conduct** can count conduct beyond the specific charge, such as total drug quantity.
- **Acceptance of responsibility, cooperation and other factors** can reduce a sentence. These are complex decisions to make with your lawyer.

Be careful with “proffers.” Prosecutors sometimes invite people to meet and share information. These meetings have real risks and limited protections. Never attend one without your own lawyer.

Federal matters we see

- Drug trafficking and conspiracy
- Firearm offenses
- White-collar crimes and fraud
- Federal firearms license (FFL) issues
- Employment discrimination lawsuits
- Other civil cases in federal court

ABOUT BUZZARD LAW FIRM

Admitted in every federal court in North Carolina.

Founder **Robert A. “Tony” Buzzard** is admitted to practice in the U.S. District Courts for the Eastern, Middle and Western Districts of North Carolina, and he has defended clients in federal criminal and civil matters.

If your case starts in state court and moves to federal court, it can stay with the lawyer who already knows it. We bring trial experience to every stage of a federal case.



Talk to a lawyer before you talk to agents.

Call our Lillington office to schedule a consultation. Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

910-893-2900



Scan to request a consultation, or visit
buzzlawfirm.com/consult

728 S. Main St., Lillington, NC 27546

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KEEP THIS WITH YOUR PAPERWORK

Federal matter information sheet

Contact with the government	
AGENCY (FBI, DEA, ATF, IRS, OTHER)	AGENT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS
DATE OF FIRST CONTACT	DOCUMENTS RECEIVED (LETTER, SUBPOENA, WARRANT)
DEADLINE OR DATE ON ANY DOCUMENT	CASE OR FILE NUMBER
Notes	
WHAT WAS SAID OR ASKED, AND WHAT WAS TAKEN	
☐ Target letter ☐ Grand jury subpoena ☐ Search warrant and inventory ☐ Indictment or complaint ☐ Release order	