



## NC Criminal Justice Summit

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Uncategorized](#)

Date : March 17, 2019



Last Friday the School hosted the NC Criminal Justice Summit at the Carolina Club, and it had the feel of a landmark event. Jessie Smith organized a program that was innovative in its approach as well as in the composition of the audience. There was a strong indication of broad support from a diverse audience for addressing several policy issues confronting the criminal justice system. According to one of the panelists, Jim Woodall, Jr., the District Attorney for Chatham and Orange Counties, "Today is going to make a difference."



The Summit focused on “key issues capturing attention in North Carolina and around the nation: bail reform; over-criminalization; and barriers to re-entry, including fines and fees and the criminal record and collateral consequences.” I came away from the day with a much better understanding of each issue and its relationship to the others, and that was largely because Jessie had done such a thorough job of working with the presenters ahead of time. The sessions had a focus and coherence that often is missing in panel presentations. [Here is a link to the agenda](#) for the Summit.



There was a panel for each issue and they followed the same format. Two national and two North Carolina-based experts (1) described the issues from their different perspectives, (2) described how some other states are addressing those issues, and (3) offered possible solutions to the challenges that had been identified. Jessie moderated two of the panels, and Jamie Markham and John Rubin each moderated one of the others. I thought they did a great job of helping to frame the issues and provide important context for some of the points made by the panelists and others.

Audience members then had the opportunity to ask questions and raise issues as a part of each panel. They added valuable perspectives and for me they made it a richer conversation. For example, a former offender talked movingly and angrily about the long-term financial impact of his conviction in a way that made the issues of fines and collateral consequences less abstract.

The final part of each session was a real-time poll of audience members on several questions related to each issue, including whether it was an issue that should be addressed in North



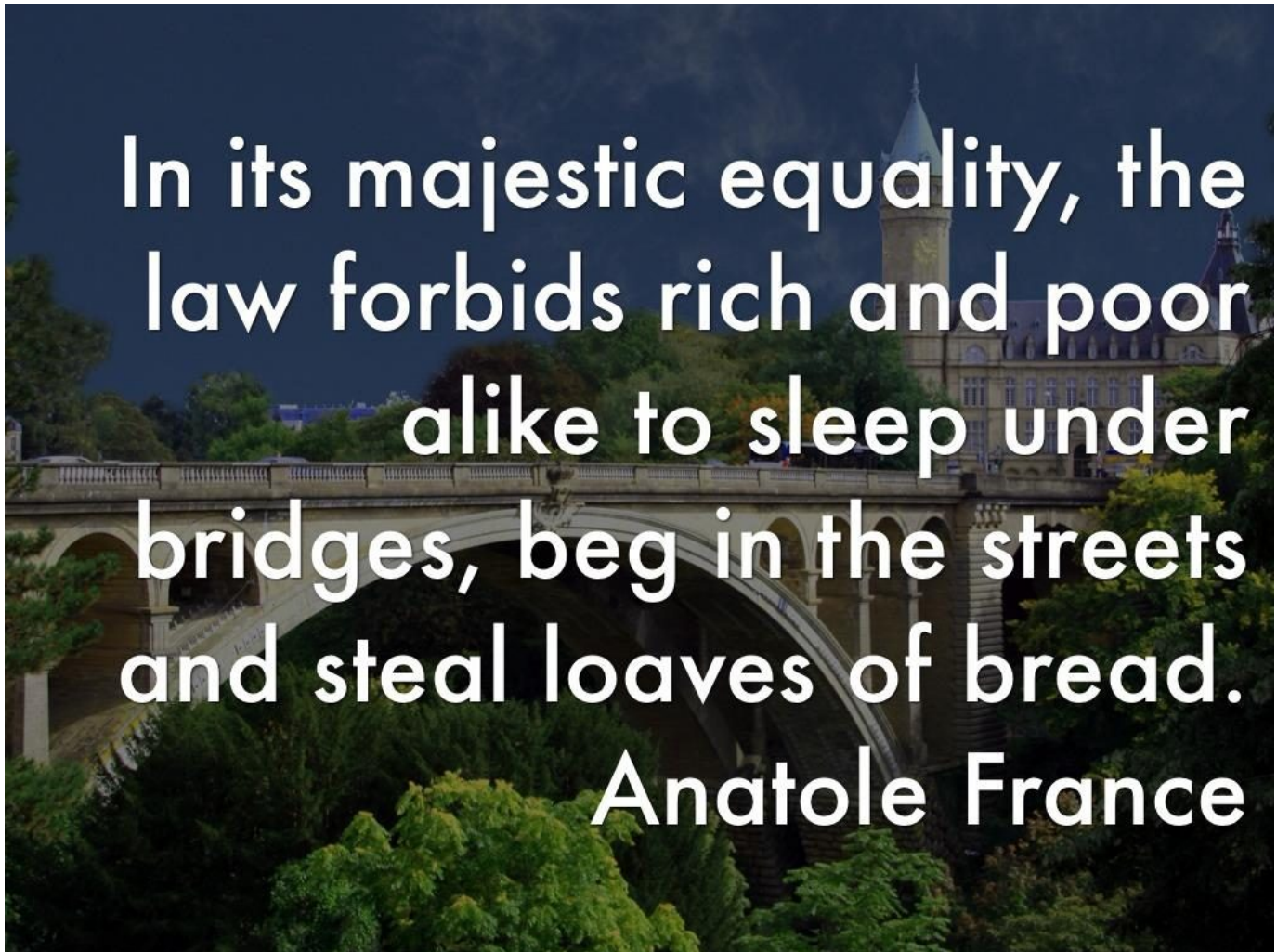
Carolina. There was overwhelming support for somehow addressing each issue, though sometimes, not surprisingly, with reservations about exactly how it might be addressed. It was clear that the people in the room shared a broad-based interest in working on these issues.

The diversity of the audience was an important and intentional feature of the Summit. The audience included legislators, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, sheriffs, police chiefs, and representatives from many different organizations interested in these and other criminal justice issues. In addition to holding different positions, the participants represented the ideological spectrum from conservative to liberal and everything in between. The attendees were assigned to tables by Jessie to insure that they were sitting with people who might come from different backgrounds and who might have different perspectives on the issues.

The panelists also consisted of national and state experts with wide-ranging ideological perspectives. One included a Senior Fellow with the Charles Koch Institute and a Staff Attorney with the ACLU. Another panel included the Executive Director of Conservatives from Criminal Justice Reform and the Executive Director of North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services. One person noted that this particular set of issues has brought together a set of "strange bedfellows." At a time when common ground on policy issues is hard to find, this Summit facilitated a respectful



dialogue and broad agreement on important issues facing North Carolina. Many thanks to the Koch Institute for supporting the Summit.



Kudos to Jessie Smith for designing a program that advanced one of the School's important priorities coming out of our strategic foresight process—greater involvement on important public policy issues. She is finding a number of important ways to advance that priority. Jessie will write a report about the Summit and share it with the participants and others who are interested in these issues. I fully expect that she will be involved in supporting future work on the issues. It represents an important and exciting opportunity for the School.

Thanks also to Cindy Lee and her colleagues who did a remarkable job of supporting this complex event with many moving parts. Thanks to others at the School who helped behind the scenes to make it happen.



Cindy Lee