

Local Innovation: Buncombe County, NC Court Date Reminder System

In 2021, volunteers from [Code with Asheville](#) developed a local court date text message reminder system for Buncombe County. Check out the [website](#). Here are some of the system's key features:

1

Subscriptions are by defendant name, not by case. The system provides reminders for all of an individual's active cases through one subscription so they don't have to sign up separately for every case. New cases are picked up by the system as well, as the information is updated weekly. Anyone can sign up for reminders for any defendant, meaning family and friends can get reminders too!

2

Message content is based in best practices. Subscribers receive two reminders for each court date—one seven days before and one two days before. The first message emphasizes potential consequences, like the risk of arrest, and the second encourages people to plan ahead for childcare and transportation.

3

Focus on accessibility and user-friendly design. The site is available in English, Spanish, and Russian and is designed to make sign-up as easy as possible. New languages can be added easily.

In January 2023, Buncombe County started allowing people to opt-in to the text reminder system as part of the jail booking process. This led to a jump in subscriptions—**over 1590 people signed up from January to July of 2023**. For comparison, as of July 2023, only 884 people TOTAL in Buncombe County had enrolled in the statewide court date reminder system provided by the NC Administrative Office of the Courts, which has been operational since 2018.



INTERESTED? THE SYSTEM CAN BE ADAPTED FOR YOUR JURISDICTION!

The code for the Buncombe text reminder system is open source, meaning anyone can use it for free. The number, timing, and content of the messages can be changed to fit the needs of your community. The system is already connected to the North Carolina Judicial Branch site, so the code can easily be adapted to send notifications for any county in North Carolina. If you're outside North Carolina, it may be a helpful starting point. Find the code [here](#).

You'll need a person with some technical expertise on your team to help implement a local reminder system. If you have questions reach out to Eric Jackson, a volunteer with Code for Asheville, at eric.jackson@democracyapps.org.