

Upper Marlboro, MD
District Court Trial Session
December 2, 2022

This morning there were 18 trial cases in Room 262B. 5 were statted, 4 were nolle prossed, 4 bench warrants, 3 continued, 1 indicted, and 1 jury trial prayed. Marquita Johnson was PD for the 8:45 docket and Charles Moore was PD for the 10:00 docket. I did not get the ASA's name. Brian Denton was the judge. Unlike the last time I saw him in the courtroom, he did not issue bench warrants when someone did not appear, but passed those cases and did a final docket call at the end.

Before the court session began, Ms. H, listed as 41 years old and "Asian" on the case information, left her seat, walked over to the officers sitting on the side and said loudly, "I not guilty! He lie to me! The police – he lie to me! I not psycho. I got my own store." The officers looked ahead stonily. She kept on, "He not even here – he lie to me," but then she looked down the row, pointed and said, "Ha, there he is! He lie to me!" The bailiff cajoled Ms. H into returning to her seat where she sat quietly until her case, a single charge of "disorderly conduct," was called. The arresting officer, the one she had pointed to, was Willie Stover, a Graham Report cop. The ASA put the case on the stet docket and Judge Denton explained to Ms. H what that meant. When she understood, she bowed to the judge. Seeing that, a number of the officers laughed. Officer Lewis, who had the word, "sheriff" written on his back in big letters, threw his head back and laughed loudly and repeatedly. It was an appalling spectacle. As the officers left the courtroom, she said "they lie to me. They hurt me and put me in jail." Before she left the courtroom, she bowed again to the judge. Officer Lewis, the "sheriff," laughed even louder and left the courtroom, too. One of us followed her out into the hallway and saw that Lewis escorted her out of the courthouse.

Why was Officer Lewis in Room 262? He was there for another case involving a woman, Ms. J. He had arrested her for theft, second degree assault, and, not surprisingly, "*resisting arrest.*" Her case was statted.

As I left the courtroom, a young woman standing outside Room 261 (preliminary hearings) said something about a case in 261: "That was just racism, right there." I talked to her a bit and then a white officer came down the hallway. She said the same thing to him: "That was racist!" He bristled and began to tell her heatedly that he was not racist and what happened was criminal, etc., etc. She answered him back with gusto and then her attorney came along and tried to end it. The white officer wouldn't let it go, so I asked him if we could talk for a bit as a way of diverting him from harassing this young woman. After we moved away, I asked the white officer if he could understand why a Black person would consider that

racism played a part in these arrests. He was having none of it and actually said, “we arrest anyone, we don’t care if they are white or Black!” I asked him about de-escalation training and whether using it in this case might have been good practice. His response? “Maybe she should de-escalate!” (I’m not making this up.) I needed to practice some de-escalation tactics myself because he was about the most defensive person I’ve ever spoken to. We talked for about 15 minutes, gathering some interesting looks as people walked by (!) and I finally said I needed to go. Since I had told him what my name was, I asked what his name was. “Dennis Smith, 3584,” he said. That name is on our list of “bad cops,” but I wasn’t sure if he was a Graham Report cop at that point, so I asked him if he knew what the Graham Report was. He answered a little too fast, coming out with this remarkable sentence: “No! What is it? Well, maybe I do.” I told him that was a subject for another day and said good-bye. Dennis Smith is not a Graham Report cop but we have flagged him for bogus car stop harassment a number of times.