

Upper Marlboro, MD
District Court Trial Session
January 6, 2023

There were 18 people and cases in Room 262B. Dispositions included 5 bench warrants, 4 continuances, 4 nolle pros, 3 stets, 1 jury trial prayed, and 1 “remanded back to mental health court.” Lilian Baah was the PD and Ada Clark-Edwards the judge. The oldest case was from September 2, 2019. There was a long line at the courthouse entrance security checkpoint. It took us 40 minutes to get inside after the building opened, and the line kept getting longer. Security was ramped up, for some unknown reason.

Courts operate as if the time of ordinary people is of no import. People lose wages, pay for transportation, child care, and other expenses to come to court. Usually, it takes at least half a day to appear at one of these brief hearings. On the other hand, police officers rack up generous overtime pay just for sitting in court and are usually paid for three or four hours, even if they are in court for minutes. Time that costs community members great inconvenience and wages, is the same time that fattens the pockets of the officers who have arrested them. Today’s court session shows this at work.

After finally reaching the courtroom today, we found the session underway. Shortly after, the clerk called the case of Mr. F who is 33 years old. He was not present. PD Baah informed judge Clark-Edwards that Mr. F was facing “transportation issues,” and asked that the case be passed. About an hour later, Mr. F came in and sat down in front of me. When his case was called again, he approached the bench but the prosecutor asked that the case be passed until later. He gave no reason for the request. Mr. F sat back down, and I asked if he had been waiting in line outside. He had waited an hour just to get inside, he said, and needed to get to work. As other cases were called, he expressed more concern about the time. Then the judge ordered a recess and left the room. Mr. F got up and spoke to the PD and then told me, once again, that he needed to get back to work. The recess dragged on and he finally rose and left the courtroom.

Soon after, the judge returned. Before long, the clerk called Mr. F’s case again, but he was gone. The public defender informed the court that Mr. F had been there for some time, but needed to return to work. The judge then lectured the PD about how “other people have obligations, too, but they still stay for their cases.” She ordered a bench warrant for Mr. F. The PD objected, but Judge Clark-Edwards was adamant. Had Mr. F’s name been called in a timely fashion, or had the prosecutor been prepared to hear his case right away, it likely would have been nolle prossed. He had shown up in court, after all.

On the other hand, PG County police officer Kenneth Meushaw made a fair amount of money by sitting there. The arrest he showed up for had been made three years earlier. But the prosecutor had provided the evidence to the PD only that morning and she hadn't been able to look at it, so it was reset for another day. Officer Meushaw sat more than two hours until this happened, but was likely paid for three or four. I thought it would be interesting to get his take on this, since we often see him in court. I asked him, in the hallway outside, if many days were like this and he said they were. Yesterday," he said, "I came in at 8:45 and didn't leave until nearly 1 pm." Let it be noted that officer Meushaw was cited in the Graham Report for numerous civilian complaints of "excessive force and derogatory language, including entering a residence without a warrant and assaulting a minor, and fondling a suspect during a search." Arresting people, and then sitting in court when their case comes up, yields overtime pay for police officers, even though their testimony is seldom solicited. But time in court pulls money out of the pockets of people who already have too little.