

Failure-To-Appear Amnesty Program Proves Successful

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I told you it wasn't a sting! It was the county's first Failure to Appear Warrant Amnesty Day and it was a huge success! I must give a big shout out to our partners. Without them, this would have never been a success. Let me recognize the public defender's office, the States Attorney's Office, the Division of Parole & Probation, the hardworking staff at the Annapolis District Court and, of course, your Sheriff's Office.

Just to recap, roughly 70 percent of all our warrants are for people who have been arrested for a crime but fail to appear (FTA) for their scheduled court date. When this occurs, the courts issue a second warrant for their absence in court.

In the June issue of the *Voice*, I announced a special day set aside in June to give people a unique

chance to have their FTA warrants withdrawn if they showed up to the District Court in Annapolis and leave with a new court date for their original offense. The sole driving motive behind this idea was to efficiently and effectively reduce the number of FTA warrants and allow my deputies to focus on more serious cases. Since an operation like this was a first for our county, we had no idea how many people, if any, would show.

On the morning of June 23, Colonel Rick Tabor and I arrived at the Annapolis District Court to monitor the operation personally. Anxiously, we waited in the designated courtroom and chatted with our partners from various agencies. No one knew what to expect. Then it happened. People started pouring into the courtroom, carrying papers they had just received from their visit with the public defender's office. With skeptical looks on their faces, I directed them to an assistant public defender assigned to the court-

room. You could visibly see their stress level decrease once they were assured it wasn't what was rumored to be another one of our tricky arrest stings. It was interesting to hear one guy tell the judge he had taken a bus early in the morning from Ohio to Annapolis to take care of his warrant.

All of the partners touted this operation as a success. By the time the court broke for lunch, 30 people had their cases heard, some with multiple warrants. When the court resumed after lunch, an additional 22 people had arrived, causing a second court to be opened so the cases could be heard more expeditiously. By the end of the day, 52 people took advantage of the program and we cleared approximately 70 warrants overall. This would have taken my deputies an entire week to arrest this many people, but instead we accomplished this in six hours. I love it when a plan comes together. Talks are underway to repeat this operation in the near future.