

Nine counts adds up to more than 10 years in prison

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La Plata, MD - For John Thomas Lewis, 60 of La Plata, time ran out in Charles County Circuit Court Wednesday, Jan. 7.

Lewis' case had been postponed due to the lack of a public defender Jan. 6 when snow and schedules conspired to postpone his sentencing for a day.

On Wednesday, when Lewis reappeared in court, Public Defender John Getz emerged to represent the defendant on his day of reckoning.

"There comes a point when your past catches up with you," Charles County Circuit Court Judge James H. West told Lewis. "You understand what went wrong. This is not a flat sentence," he added. "Once you do your time, that will be the end of it."

Lewis was facing sentencing on nine counts, including a violation of probation, conspiracy to commit theft (\$1,000 to \$10,000), driving while suspended, possession of drug paraphernalia, theft of less than \$1,000, two driving under the influence charges, theft under \$100, and another count of driving while suspended.

The accumulated time for incarceration on the combined charges will total more than 10 years.

Lewis served 12 years for robbery two decades ago, which resulted in his violation of probation charge when he broke the terms of his probationary status.

"I know I screwed up," Lewis told the court. "When I think about it, alcohol and drug had me homeless at the same time."

"All of the charges occurred in a relatively short period of time," Charles County Assistant State's Attorney Jonathan Beattie told the court. "He did have a number of charges. You have a lot of discretion," he told West.

"Does he deserve 10 years?" Beattie asked, "I doubt it. But the guidelines are what they are."

"Your honor, my client is not violent," Getz said. "Not to diminish from his criminal activity, but he did these things to support his habit."

Gary Hamilton, a friend of the defendant who works for the Department of the Navy and the U.S. Department of Labor, told the court that Lewis was a skilled contractor who did some work for him.

"In addition to the alcohol and cocaine, Mr. Lewis was homeless at one point," Hamilton said. "He has applied on his own to Walden-Sierra for treatment. Homelessness is the motivating factor this court needs to understand. Human nature takes its place."

West sentenced Lewis to 18 months on the theft under \$100 charge, two years for violation of probation, six years for conspiracy to commit theft (\$1,000 to \$10,000), 60 days for driving while suspended, 18 months on the theft of less than \$1,000 count, 60 days apiece on the two DUI charges, and another 60 days on the second driving while suspended charge. The judge offered a suspended sentence on the possession of drug paraphernalia charge.

"You did take some steps to help yourself, and I took into consideration what Mr. Hamilton said," West noted. "When you come into court with nine cases and 10 priors, you tie the court's hands."

Lewis was taken into custody at the end of the hearing. West said that all of Lewis' sentences will run concurrent to each other at the Maryland Department of Corrections.

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