

Do NOT Fail to Respond Once a Police Officer Charges You — and Especially Not a Judge: Here's Why

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Date : October 5, 2017

Not showing up to court, even for a relatively minor charge, can get you an arrest at an inopportune time, and you've got to come up with a bond before police release you.

Here's how that situation can get worse, even without you committing anything like a major crime. Much worse.

You don't show up for court when you've got several minor charges against you. Warrants for your arrest go out, and if police come across you in the days, weeks, months or possibly years ahead, you'll get arrested. And have to pay a bond for each one of the charges associated with a separate arrest. But it can get worse than that.

Police could come across you on a Friday or Saturday. And the separate bonds, when added up, can total more than you can pay or arrange with a bondsman to pay.

That means you could be in jail until Monday morning, when they take you to court. Talk about a lost weekend.

That's what happened to a 22-year-old Norwalk woman, according to Darien police. Police gave this account of what happened, including accusations not proven in court:

At about 5 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 30, a police officer stopped a vehicle on the Post Road near West Norwalk Road because it didn't have a front license plate. The woman was a passenger.

"As a result of the investigation, it was determined that [the woman] had several bench warrants," police said in an announcement about the arrest.

A "bench warrant" is what you might guess — an arrest order by a judge. The warrants are issued by judges when someone doesn't show up for a hearing in court or fails to pay a ticket or ask for a hearing to dispute a ticket.

Courts in Connecticut and elsewhere generally let the failure to show up or respond once before it happens again, resulting in the arrest warrant is issued from the judge's bench.

The woman has been charged with:

- Failure to appear in court on charges of driving with a suspended license and driving without a license (charge from Fairfield police);
- Failure to respond to a ticket on charges of possession of less than half an ounce of marijuana (charge from Fairfield police);
- Same charge as immediately above (from New Canaan police);
- Failure to respond to a ticket for littering (from Norwalk police).

The woman was arrested and taken to Darien Police Headquarters — where she wasn't able to pay or get a bondsman to pay the \$1,650 in bonds for the several cases.

Sometimes a state bail commissioner shows up at a police station, looks through the arrests and lowers the bond enough (occasionally eliminating it) so that the arrestee can get out of incarceration. For whatever reason, that didn't happen here. She stayed in jail until Monday morning, when she was taken to state Superior Court in Stamford.