

Courts of the County of Hanover

Hon. J. Overton Harris

Hanover Circuit Court

Judge Harris reported that, overall, members of the Bar were complying with the Court's new local rules, especially as they related to continuances, which are discouraged if they are sought within thirty days of the scheduled date for hearing or trial. In an effort to minimize delays in the docket, the Court is offering half-day jury slots in order to avoid forcing the parties to wait four to six months for a full-day opening, especially if some of the issues in a case are uncontested, *e.g.* if liability is admitted in a civil matter and the only issue for trial is damages.

Judge Harris encourages practitioners to take advantage of the Court's audio/visual technology, which is available for use in trials. The courtroom has a digital projector for documents on the witness stand, with monitors at the bench, at counsel table and in the jury box. Additionally, the courtroom is wired for video-conferencing, which can be especially helpful for bond hearings or live testimony from expert witnesses who may be out-of-state. The Court's IT personnel are more than happy to set up a pretrial meeting in order to ensure that counsel are familiar with the equipment and its capabilities.

Judge Harris indicated that practitioners were getting better about predicting the time required for hearings or trial, and he invited comments or suggestions from the Bar about how the docket may be run more efficiently, including any concerns about the amount of time to have *pendente lite* support motions heard or any other timing issues.

Hon. Peter L. Tribble

Hanover General District Court

Judge Tribble advised that last year, Hanover General District Court changed its docket procedures, such that criminal matters are now heard at 9:00 a.m. before the traffic docket. This modification to the schedule has been well-received, especially by members of the criminal defense bar, because the traffic docket in Hanover is so time-consuming that dispensing with criminal matters first allows those attorneys to use the rest of the morning for appearances in other courts.

Speaking of appearances by counsel, Judge Tribble *strongly* discourages attorneys from noting an appearance in a case shortly before a hearing or trial by way of a letter that requests a continuance and provides only the available dates of the appearing attorney. This approach shows a lack of diligence and professionalism on the part of counsel and burdens the Court with the task of finding a new date. The better approach would be for appearing counsel to *first* coordinate a new date with opposing counsel, or in the case of a testifying officer, call the Court for an available date prior to noting your appearance and requesting a continuance.

Judge Tribble noted that he is seeing an increased number of *pro se* litigants, particularly in criminal and traffic matters, and that *pro se* matters are difficult cases for both the judges and for opposing counsel. Judge Tribble noted that it would be helpful, both in *pro se* cases and others, if counsel citing a legal principle would have a copy of the pertinent statute or case available for the Court to review, instead of simply making a sweeping proposition about what the law may be.

Overall, Judge Tribble is happy with the level of practice before his Court, particularly with regard to the level of civility and preparedness displayed by the attorneys appearing before him.

Hon. Larry Gilman

Hanover Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court

Judge Gilman stated that things are going well and praised the attorneys who appear before him for their demeanor and preparation. He said he was retiring shortly and expressed his appreciation to members of the Bar for their good work over the past 12 years.

Judge Gilman observed that he is seeing an increased number of *pro se* litigants, particularly in custody matters, and encouraged the Bar to do what it can to assist folks who can't afford an attorney.