

Cannabis – A Case Study in 2024-2025

State v. Montez Smith, C-24-CR-24-000652, CC# 9240506985

In January 2024, the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) began an investigation into a Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) known by the street name “Young Money Chasers” or “YMC.” YMC operated out of the Southern District and was primarily engaged in the street level distribution of suspected pounds of marijuana in the area of the Cherry Hill Public Housing Complex. During the investigation, Montez Smith was identified, along with approximately four other individuals, as the primary members within YMC who possessed and distributed marijuana on a daily basis. The investigation included 70 hours of physical surveillance by police between January and May of 2024. It was believed that YMC was distributing tens of thousands of dollars per day of illicit marijuana.

On May 22, 2024, two search and seizure warrants were executed, one on a residence and one on a vehicle. Montez Smith was the listed target on both search warrants. Seven detectives executed the warrants. Montez Smith opened the front door and was detained with another occupant without incident. Detectives recovered 28 pounds of cannabis and a handgun magazine from the vehicle. From the apartment, Detectives recovered jewelry with a value in excess of \$100,000, a handgun¹, and \$43,000 US Currency.²

Montez Smith was charged on May 22, 2024, with possession of a firearm during and in relation to a drug trafficking crime, possession with intent to distribute cannabis, conspiracy to distribute cannabis, and possession of cannabis in an amount over civil use. At his bail review, both Pretrial as well as the State requested that Mr. Smith be held without bail. A Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement – Safe Streets representative showed up at the bail review to show support for Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith was given an unsecured bond and was released within approximately 48 hours of being arrested (he later was put on home detention pre-sentencing, which he violated and ultimately was held for approximately a month prior to sentencing).

Mr. Smith was indicted on or about June 18, 2024, in a 12-Count Indictment with use of a firearm during and in relation to a drug trafficking crime, distribution of cannabis, possession with intent to distribute cannabis, and multiple conspiracy charges. During trial preparation, there were over 20 separate Axon videos the prosecutor watched which included over 20 hours of video footage. Also in trial preparation, the prosecutor had to interact with and prepare the detectives, the firearms examiner and the CDS analyst for their testimony.

Mr. Smith went to trial on February 3, 2025, which concluded the following day on February 4, 2025. Mr. Smith waived a jury and elected a bench trial in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City. Three BPD Detectives were called to testify during the trial, along with a BPD Firearms Examiner and BPD Lab Analyst. The Court found Mr. Smith guilty of distribution of

¹ The handgun was registered to Montez Smith.

² In total, police executed nine search warrants related to YMC and recovered 5 firearms and over 100 pounds of cannabis along with \$290,000 US Currency.

cannabis and possession with intent to distribute cannabis. Mr. Smith was either granted a motion for judgment of acquittal or found not guilty of the remaining charges.

On April 16, 2025, the Court sentenced Mr. Smith to 5 years suspending all but time served³ for distribution of cannabis and 3 years all but time served for possession with intent to distribute cannabis, each sentence followed by 3 years of probation and 50 hours of community services to be completed within one year.

The total work and hours put into the case by BPD and BCSAO included:

-70 Hours of Surveillance by BPD

-BPD Detectives spend a day writing, obtaining a judge's signature, and seven Detectives execute the two warrants

-BCSAO working up a bail recommendation to HWOB and attending the bail review (Defendant was released on bail within approximately 48 hours of arrest)

-Attending subsequent bail reviews when defendant violated his pre-trial release conditions

-Watching over 20 hours of Axon video

-ASA had multiple meetings with supervisors to review case and legal theories/issues

-Multiple conversations with the SAO Front Office on plea offers, and subsequent conversations with defense counsel regarding possible pleas

-Conducting discovery with defense counsel including BPD PIU disclosures

-Preparing testimony of three Detectives, a Firearms Examiner, and Lab Analyst

-10 hours of additional ASA trial preparation

-Two days of conducting trial wherein the five above-listed BPD witnesses were called to testify to obtain guilty verdict on distribution of cannabis and possession with intent to distribute cannabis

-Another day to attend sentencing where defendant received time served, probation and community service

³ Approximately 69 days total from his time on home detention and the approximate month he spent incarcerated prior to sentencing.