

The Sun

**Court frees Spencer to await trial  
Activist facing drug charges released into sister's custody  
'There is a God'  
Magistrate puts strict limits on his actions**

by Dan Thanh Dang

March 6, 1998 Page(s): 1B  
Edition: ARUNDEL  
Section: NEWS  
Length: 783 words  
Record Number: BSUN03060577

---

Curtis Allan Spencer, who blamed a "political conspiracy" for his arrest this week on federal drug charges, joked as he was released yesterday after a detention hearing in U.S. District Court in Baltimore.

"There is a God," shouted Spencer, the founder of Friends of Black Annapolitans, as he left the courtroom. "I'm going to Disney World."

Magistrate Susan K. Gauvey noted Spencer's public activism, his close ties to his family in Annapolis and his lack of a long criminal record as sufficient reason to release him to the custody of his sister in Arnold while he awaits trial.

Gauvey forbade Spencer to change his address, travel outside Maryland, contact any of the defendants in the case, possess weapons or commit any offenses while awaiting trial. She also required him to find a job, appear at all court dates, keep appointments with pretrial services officers and adhere to a 9 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew at his sister's house.

His sister, Deborah Johnson said, "I'm just glad he's coming home."

Spencer had been held in the Baltimore Detention Center since he and 17 others were arrested Tuesday as police served search warrants at 12 locations in Annapolis. He and four others have been charged with federal drug violations. The other 13 were arrested on similar state charges.

Annapolis police detectives have long been after the drug ring Spencer allegedly led, which they say has controlled Annapolis' public housing communities for more than 25 years. Police say the alleged ring is responsible for almost 80 percent of the cocaine sales in Annapolis, moving about \$20,000 worth of drugs a week.

Spencer has denied involvement in the ring.

"I'm not saying I'm a saint, but I'm not a devil as they paint me, either," said Spencer, who was somber throughout the hearing but jubilant as family and friends cheered the judge's decision. The "police are forever at me. They'd arrest me even if I spit on the street. It is all political. The truth will come out."

His release came the same day that a federal grand jury indicted Spencer on charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine base. Also indicted on those charges and released yesterday were Theodore Lee Brown, 44, president of Black Annapolitans, and John David Lane, 41, the group's treasurer.

Brown was sent to a local shelter for veterans, and Lane was sent to a halfway house in Baltimore. Both are under the supervision of pretrial services officers.

Annapolis police said they were not surprised by Spencer's release.

"We knew that going in because of his lack of a criminal record for drugs," Chief Joseph S. Johnson said. "But we had a lot of community residents call us to say they didn't want him back in Annapolis. As long as he isn't released into the city, we'll rest easier."

Yesterday, prosecutors focused on Spencer's role as the alleged leader of the drug ring as they argued that he should stay in jail. The defense focused on his role as community activist and leader of a black political group who made a name for himself by

criticizing the Police Department.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard Kay argued that detention was necessary because "this is an extremely serious offense and he has a history of violence that indicates there is a danger to the community."

The evidence against Spencer is "extremely strong," Kay said, noting hand-to-hand drug buys and tape-recorded conversations with agents of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration. Kay said 12 bags of packaged marijuana were found on Spencer at the time of his arrest and that two "assassin-type firearms" were found in his bedroom.

Spencer was convicted in 1969 of assault with intent to murder a security guard, Kay told the judge. He served 17 months in state prison.

Defense lawyer Anthony Covington described his client as a leader of the community who coached a recreation league basketball team.

"He has been a vocal critic of the police and system. He is not going to run," Covington said. "He does not have a home. He does not have a car. He is going to stay here. He is no danger to the community."

Spencer said in arguing for his release, "Your honor, I founded an organization that helped low-income people with political problems. I raised money for Christmas and Thanksgiving for families. Your honor, I love my family."

Copyright 1998 The Baltimore Sun Company