

ADDRESS, CONFERENCE OF TRIAL MAGISTRATES

BALTIMORE

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Let me begin by saying that it has been a privilege and an honor to have been associated so closely during these five and a half years with members of the judiciary of the State of Maryland. The respect and admiration I have always felt for the judges and magistrates of our State has increased with the closer acquaintance I have had with them during my tenure as Governor. I deeply appreciate the effort that has been made by this organization to improve the administration of justice in Maryland by strengthening our courts of limited jurisdiction.

The judicial system of Maryland may be likened to a pyramid with the Court of Appeals, our highest appellate court, at the apex, with the courts of limited jurisdiction at its base, and with the circuit or trial courts in an intermediate position. As with a pyramid of stone and mortar, the court system, I am convinced, can be neither better nor stronger than its base. Consequently the importance of our People's Courts, of our Municipal Court of Baltimore City, and of our trial magistrate system becomes obvious.

These courts are sometimes referred to as our "inferior" courts, or as our "minor" courts. The terminology thus used is derived from their limited jurisdiction, coupled with the fact that their decisions usually are subject to appeal to the trial courts of general jurisdiction. But in their importance in the administration of justice, they are neither "inferior" nor "minor." A vastly greater number of cases are tried and disposed of in our courts of limited jurisdiction than in the other courts of our State. Daily hundreds of our citizens find their way through the doors of these courts in search of justice, resisting claims, and demanding vindication of their position. The same is true of defendants in criminal and traffic cases. A recent report of the administrative office showed more than 20,000 criminal and traffic cases disposed of in a single month, and this figure includes neither the work of the Municipal Court of Baltimore City nor of many trial magistrates.

People coming before our trial magistrates are worried people, whose problems are as great as any in the world. What happens to them is vitally important. To many, the only court with which they will ever come in contact is one or another of our so-called "minor" courts. The proceedings observed in them is the basis of the conception of justice many will carry with them through life. To a large number of these