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## Maryland Community News

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**Johnson reports for duty, votes in final public day on County Council** by DANIEL

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*Staff Writer*

Embattled Prince George's County Councilwoman Leslie Johnson (D-Dist. 6) of Mitchellville ended her last public day on the council without fanfare, acknowledgement or objection from her colleagues.

Aside from calling on her when it was time to vote, members did not publicly engage Johnson, whose last official day as councilwoman is July 31. Tuesday was the last scheduled council meeting before September.

Her last vote was to have the council convene in a closed session to discuss a pending lawsuit. Speaking about her continued attendance, Council Chairwoman Ingrid Turner, a longtime Johnson ally, said that her presence over the past three weeks was not welcome.

"The council had asked for her immediate resignation. We hoped she would have honored the request," Turner said. "It's unfortunate that the request has not been honored."

Johnson, the wife of former County Executive Jack B. Johnson (D) who pleaded guilty June 30 to a federal charge of evidence tampering, refused to comment Tuesday.

The couple was arrested Nov. 12 for helping to hide bribes the former executive took from developers. As FBI agents knocked on the door of their Mitchellville manor on Nov. 12, Leslie Johnson called her husband, flushed a check for \$100,000 down their toilet and tried to hide \$79,000 in cash in her undergarments, according to plea agreements the couple signed.

Despite the pending charges, Johnson, 59, took the oath of office in December. After several court delays, she pleaded guilty June 30 and faces sentencing in October.

State law allows a lawmaker who has pleaded guilty to wait until their sentencing to step down, though Johnson chose an earlier departure.

While mostly silent Tuesday, Johnson noted her concerns with bills before her votes, including one for new stormwater management regulations that she feared would make it harder to attract economic development to aging communities inside the Beltway such as Largo.

"I'm not convinced that this bill addresses the unique challenges of established communities, who have historically had trouble attracting redevelopment," she said.

Brent Bolin, advocacy director with the Anacostia Watershed Society, said that Johnson's presence was distasteful.

"It's pretty sad that she was a decisive vote to weaken an important piece of environmental legislation," he said.

"Unfortunately, the law has this ambiguity."

Johnson's decision to remain on the council through July allowed her to collect about \$2,000 in pay. State law allows a public official who has pled to a crime to serve until they are sentenced.

At their first meeting after her plea three weeks ago, council members reassigned Johnson's staff and seized her county-issued car and cell phone. She was also unable to give out grants or spend any more money from her office.

County staff said they were not certain if the council would order an audit of Johnson's spending while in office, since it is not required under the county charter. Legislative auditors are required to review spending whenever a department head leaves the county.

Upper Marlboro businessman Leo Brusco said he was upset that officials were powerless to suspend the councilwoman.

"She costs us more money every week," he said.

The council is scheduled to meet Aug. 2 to schedule a special election for Johnson's seat in District 6, which includes portions of Mitchellville, South Bowie, Capitol Heights, District Heights, Forestville, Kettering, Largo and Upper Marlboro.

Council members have declined several requests to speak about Johnson. At a meeting last week, longtime friend

and Councilman Obie Patterson (D-Dist. 8) of Fort Washington said that Johnson's decision to attend meetings was "her choice."  
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