

Circuit Court for Harford County
Case No. C-12-CR-24-000386

UNREPORTED

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 1550

September Term, 2024

WALTER THOMAS HARTMAN, III

v.

STATE OF MARYLAND

Leahy,
Albright,
Kehoe, Christopher B.
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

PER CURIAM

Filed: December 4, 2025

*This is a per curiam opinion. Under Rule 1-104, the opinion is not precedent within the rule of stare decisis, nor may it be cited as persuasive authority.

— Unreported Opinion —

Convicted by a jury in the Circuit Court for Harford County of second degree assault, Walter Thomas Hartman, III, appellant, presents for our review a single issue: whether the court “abused its discretion in finding that there was no meritorious reason for [his] request to discharge counsel.” For the reasons that follow, we shall affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

On February 4, 2024, the complainant reported to a police officer that earlier that day, Mr. Hartman, with whom the complainant had a domestic relationship, “grabbed [the complainant] by the arms and threw her onto the bed leaving bruises on her left arm.” The officer “observed . . . bruises on [the complainant’s] left arm and a small bump on her left wrist.” Mr. Hartman was subsequently charged in the District Court for Harford County with assaulting the complainant “in the second degree during a domestic related incident.”

On April 10, 2024, Mr. Hartman’s case was transferred from the district court to the circuit court. On August 8, 2024, defense counsel, who is an Assistant Public Defender, entered her appearance on behalf of Mr. Hartman. On September 27, 2024, the parties appeared for trial. Defense counsel notified the court that Mr. Hartman wanted “to ask for a continuance to obtain new counsel,” because he was “not satisfied with [defense counsel’s] representation.” The court asked Mr. Hartman to “explain [his] dissatisfaction with . . . counsel.” Mr. Hartman replied that there was a “lack of communication,” he had “no preparation . . . with . . . counsel,” they had not “rehearsed or gone over or practiced anything,” and his experience was “very unsettling” and “scary.” The court asked Mr. Hartman what he meant by “lack of communication” and “preparation.” Mr. Hartman replied that he had received “no communication whatsoever” from defense counsel, he felt

“like [he was] walking into this completely blind[,] completely scared to death, and not knowing what’s going on,” the “answers [that had been] given to [him] were . . . just like belittling[] and very unkind,” and he “just want[ed] to have a fair trial.” The court asked Mr. Hartman whether he was “asking to discharge” defense counsel or “asking to have the Public Defender’s Office stricken.” Mr. Hartman replied: “She said we were going to talk about possibly a continuance to try to prepare for all of this, because we have not done so, yet. And that was kind of under the impression I’m on right now.”

The court subsequently heard from defense counsel and the prosecutor. The prosecutor stated, in pertinent part, that Mr. Hartman had “raised the issue of perhaps discharging counsel.” Specifically, explained the prosecutor, Mr. Hartman stated “something to the effect of, ‘I need to go call my friend who is a lawyer’” when the prosecutor had attempted to speak to the complainant at a time when she was accompanied by Mr. Hartman. In response to the prosecutor, Mr. Hartman stated, in pertinent part: “[T]he prosecutor literally just brings this up this thing as if, like, I was already terminating her, and that they had already kind of conspired, and talked about it as if, like, that I was going to be getting rid of her and I was talking to a lawyer. And this is all completely news to me.”

The court then asked Mr. Hartman whether he “want[ed] a postponement to retain counsel” or for “something else.” Mr. Hartman replied that he had “asked counsel . . . what grounds to ask for a continuance are, if [he was] trying to prepare for trial.” Following Mr. Hartman’s remarks, the court stated: “There is nothing that I have heard here today to suggest to this [c]ourt in any way that you have a meritorious reason to discharge your

counsel of record.” The court further stated: “[T]he fact that you may have a different view on things than your counsel doesn’t mean that it’s a meritorious reason to discharge her, appoint another attorney to you, or give you a postponement so you can try to seek another counsel.” When the court asked Mr. Hartman whether he “wish[ed] to discharge [defense counsel] and represent [him]self,” Mr. Hartman replied: “I cannot represent myself.” The court found that Mr. Hartman was “making a knowing[] and voluntary election to keep” defense counsel, and proceeded to trial.

Mr. Hartman contends that, for numerous reasons, the court “abused its discretion in finding that there was no meritorious reason for [his] request to discharge counsel.” But, Mr. Hartman never requested that defense counsel be discharged. When the court explicitly asked Mr. Hartman whether he wanted to discharge either defense counsel or the Office of the Public Defender, or wanted a “postponement to retain [other] counsel,” he replied that he wanted a continuance for additional time to prepare for trial. When the prosecutor admitted that he had “raised the issue of perhaps discharging counsel,” Mr. Hartman emphatically objected and indicated that he had no desire to discharge counsel. Finally, when the court explicitly asked Mr. Hartman whether he wanted to discharge defense counsel and represent himself, he declined. Mr. Hartman did not make a request that would have required the court to consider discharging defense counsel pursuant to Rule 4-215(e) (“[i]f a *defendant* requests permission to discharge an attorney whose appearance has been entered, the court shall permit the defendant to explain the reasons for

the request" (emphasis added)). Accordingly, we conclude that the court did not abuse its discretion in finding no meritorious reason to discharge defense counsel.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
FOR HARFORD COUNTY AFFIRMED.
COSTS TO BE PAID BY APPELLANT.**