

The summer of 2015, I was in a park with my friends in Silver Spring, Montgomery County. It was after dark, which we did not know was considered "trespassing" at the time (especially considering that the park had plenty of street lights that went on after the sun went down). We just thought we were hanging out in the park after sundown.

Some other kids around our age showed up and started smoking cannabis. We didn't do anything because they weren't causing harm to anyone and it wasn't our problem. Then, a cop car pulls into the park.

The kids who were smoking were able to get in their cars and drive away with no repercussions. I don't care about this. What I do care about is that we went up to talk to the officer and she started accusing us of doing drugs in the park. We told her that we weren't and she actually let the kids who were smoking just drive away without stopping them. I see why she would be skeptical of this, but she didn't even attempt to speak to them. We said we were happy to leave, just as she let them leave. She didn't believe us and she called more officers.

These officers were incredibly rude and unprofessional. They began to search my car with dogs, which I was okay with because I knew I had nothing in there. They completely tore my car up and made a mess. Threw my tampons all over the place. Unplugged everything. Left every possible compartment open and threw the contents all over my car. We waited for hours for them to do this. In the process, they harassed us, laughed at us, and one of the cops "joked" that he was going to break my friend's legs. He laughed about it after and so did his cop buddies. It was disgusting. After all of this, they found nothing, because nothing was there, and charged us with trespassing.

I cannot express how much this experience made me feel like cops in this county care more about power than safety. I had very little trust in law enforcement before this, and this absolutely didn't help. Joking about brutalizing a teenager, especially when you have no proof that they did anything wrong, is not a joke and is not funny. Nor should it be allowed from people who are allowed to carry deadly weapons. It's actually quite disgusting behavior that would get anyone in any other job fired immediately.

I still think about this experience often because it was so messed up in so many ways. When I called the police department directly to file a complaint, somehow they weren't able to figure out who the officer was. I don't believe that for a second. It felt clear to me that they did not want to hear me out, because they kept making excuses for why he might have been right to treat us terribly (even though they clearly were not there) instead of believing me and apologizing. I have no reason to make this situation up. Making excuses for your coworker when you were not there and then refusing to allow me to file a complaint is also pretty shady and untrustworthy behavior.

Maybe the key message here is to stop acting like drugs are the most dangerous thing in Montgomery County when grown adults go around terrorizing teenagers on a literal playground. It's frustrating to see police officers act like they're oppressed in today's society when they go around acting like this. They seem to want a better reputation without ever changing the way they treat people. That is not going to work. If police officers want respect from civilians, they're going to have to learn how to treat civilians with respect first.