

**April - June 2006 Term
Grand Jury Final Report**

Service on the Davidson County Grand Jury has been an experience that we each feel has more strongly connected us to our community and we are thankful for the opportunity. At the beginning of our term, most of us questioned the significance of the role we were to play in the judicial process, mainly due to our lack of training in criminal law. However, over the course of the term, we have come to appreciate at least two very important aspects of the Grand Jury: (1) a layman's common sense in a fair trial and (2) an avenue to bring common citizens into an active role in fighting crimes. First, we can not scrutinize the laws and determine the specifics of criminal charges, but with common sense and our own safety in mind, we can insure that irrational charges are not being subjected to our fellow peers. Secondly, through our service on the Grand Jury, we have been exposed directly to the crimes that are occurring in our community daily, as well as to the efforts that are being exercised to combat and treat these crimes. This experience has given us a new prospective which will hopefully impact our future involvement in our community in a positive manner.

THANKS & RECOGNITION

Judge Randall Wyatt – Thank you for the opportunity to serve as members of the Davidson County Grand Jury. We have been given a wonderful opportunity to serve our community, while also personally benefiting from gained insight into how our law enforcement and judicial processes function. We extend a special thanks for spending some extra time with us one-on-one, listening to and discussing some of the concerns that we encountered during our Grand Jury tenure.

Stan Fossick, Grand Jury Foreman – We have been extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve on the grand jury under the direction of an experienced and well-respected foreman. It has been an honor to work with a fellow citizen whom has such excitement and dedication toward this important civic duty. Thank you for your time, your guidance, and your generosity.

Capt. Todd Henry & Lt. Randy Hickerson, Special Investigation Division MPD – Early into our term, we received an invaluable presentation from Capt Henry and Lt Hickerson on the enormous variety of illegal drugs that exist in our community, as well as the associated paraphernalia and terminology. In addition, common prostitution, gambling, and gang practices were also presented. Although it saddens us to say so, this information proved to serve us on a daily basis as we heard indictment presentations.

Capt. Rita Baker, Domestic Violence Division, MPD – Many domestic violence cases tended to stimulate controversy due often to the lack of witnesses coupled with victims that refuse to press charges, file complaints, request restraining orders, etc. Capt. Baker provided us with a glimpse into the complicated psychology that underlies domestic violence and provided explanations of the various types of abuse that we could encounter. We especially appreciate this guidance that allowed us hear these usually emotional cases with a sympathetic ear, but importantly also with a more educated and rationale approach that hopefully always resulted in a just verdict.

Capt. Mike Hager, Lt. Glenn Hayes, Sgt. Gary Duncan, Sgt. James Johnson, Flt. Officer Andy Smeltzer, Metro Police Training Academy – We were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to visit the Metro Police Training Academy where we were able to see first hand the rigid training that cadets receive during 22 weeks of training at the Academy. In addition, we met with members of the K-9 and aviation sections that graciously explained their roles within the Police Department. Daily, we listen to the testimonies of police officers that were either the arresting officer or the officer on the scene of a crime, and it was an added benefit to see where and how they were trained.

Jim Green, TBI – Through a tour of the TBI, our group was able to gain knowledge into the foundation of this invaluable organization. We also became more aware of the time and man power dedicated to processing evidence gathered at the scene of a crime. We appreciate Jim Green and other members of the TBI staff for taking their time to answer our questions and provide a tour of the facility.

Judge Betty Green, Juvenile Court- We commend Judge Betty Green and the rest of her staff for their efforts in the rehabilitation and intervention of the young individuals that come before her in Juvenile court. Judge Green comes in contact with children at an age when critical decisions in their lives are being made that can impact their behaviors for the rest of their lives. It is important that we provide all of the support that we can to her endeavors to direct our youth down the right path.

Janet Hobson & Judge Seth Norman, Davidson County Drug Court – We thank Janet Hobson and the individuals at Drug Court who escorted us through their facility and shared with us their experiences. The Drug Court is an absolutely amazing example of time, money, and energy being focused into the treatment of a problem, and for that we give our highest praises to Judge Norman for his vision and to both Judge Norman and Janet Hobson for making it a successful reality. The vast majority of the crimes presented to the Grand Jury involve drugs, and in order to reduce these crimes, efforts must be focused at treating the criminals as much as, if not more than, at punishing them. We highly suggest that support (money and otherwise) continue to be given generously to this endeavor as well as any future endeavors of this kind.

Chief Ronal Serpas, Nashville Metropolitan Police Department – Thank you Chief Serpas for inviting the Grand Jury to attend a CompStat meeting and for appearing before our body following that meeting to further answer and discuss our questions. Your personal time was appreciated, and the CompStat meeting provided us a glimpse into how such an enormous body as the MPD can efficiently operate together and maintain common goals.

Metro Police Officers - We would like to commend the officers for an exemplary job in both managing the criminal activity in our city as well as treating victims of crime with kindness, respect, and dignity. We have heard many examples of officers who take personal time to assist with traffic accidents and neighborhood issues. We appreciate that officers stop in at local businesses to assure all is well and promote positive relationships with local citizens. Also, deserving thanks is the immediate care officers provide to children during arrest incidents or warrant deliveries. In particular, we would like to recognize the Domestic Violence Division and their well thought out plan of action for assisting the families of domestic violence. It is obvious that your role in the community is enormous, encompassing a large jurisdiction. Thank you for a job well done.

Finally, we would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in directing and aiding us in our Grand Jury service:

Debbie Franklin
Mel Harders, Grand Jury Coordinator
Donna Dale
Sgt. Ryan Casada
District Attorney's Office

CONCERNS & SUGGESTIONS

It is not our intent to throw darts at anyone or any program within Metro. However, we would like to present some very real concerns and fears we have developed from our time in the Grand Jury. Indeed, it is our hope that we can in some way assist in evaluating these suggestions and determine how or if there is anyway to implement them in full or in part. Should there be a need or request to set-up any type of committee to look into these items, we would be happy to serve as members.

DUIs

One item of great concern is the number of DUI cases we reviewed, the age of many of those cases, and the number of times the same individual was charged with the offense. We would like to suggest that a special DUI Grand Jury be put in place to lessen the time between arrest and Grand Jury case review. We would also like to suggest that either a court be put in place exclusively to hear DUI cases or that the current judges set aside a dedicated time to hear these cases with the intention of more efficiently moving them through the system. Finally, we suggest that possible legislation be brought forth to enforce stronger penalties for individuals who repeatedly violate our current DUI laws.

Repeat Offenders

Even in our limited 3-month tenure, we were often presented with multiple cases on the same individual. In some cases, the officers explained to us that between the arrest and the time the case comes before a Grand Jury, these individuals had committed additional crimes. While this may well be a legislative issue, we would ask Metro to consider possible solutions within their domain.

Foreign Nationals

We would like to express concern over the large number of criminals that are foreign nationals in this country illegally. Our concern is that there does not appear to be a clear plan of action to communicate their illegal status to the proper federal authorities. This is exemplified by the fact that in several cases, these individuals are repeat offenders.

Language Skills

We suggest that Metro look into the possibility of making additional language and language training skills available to all officers. Nashville contains a very diverse population, and for the safety of our officers and the safety of the individuals within our community, we ask Metro to improve language barriers between the officers and the citizens they are serving.

Purse Snatchers

These criminals cause untold problems for their victims. The act has the potential for a dangerous situation, and we would ask that purse snatching be graded as a more serious crime.

Juvenile Court Facility

As mentioned above, we greatly admire the efforts of Judge Green and the Juvenile Court, however, we would like to bring it to attention that they are addressing one of the most important problems in our community (our children) with limited resources. The facility they operate out of is not the most ideal. They could obviously use a single level facility with more recreational space and equipment. The best thing for a young and vital child is activity, but their current space allows for little of that. At the very least, they could use a cover over their small recreational space so that even this limited recreation is not lost during inclement weather.

TBI Personnel

We do not discard the value of this institution; however we were a bit disappointed to observe an obvious lack of personnel in the wet labs of the department. Our tour of the facility occurred midday of a non-holiday Monday, and there were multiple equipped labs and desks with no signs of use. There may be good reason for this lack of personnel, but our tour guide did not seem to suggest that this was any different from any other day. Thus, there is a degree of concern that is raised in our minds about the efficiency with which TBI test results can be obtained.

Nashville MPD Morale

It has not been too hard to see that the morale of the Police Department, as a whole, is very low. We recommend to Chief Serpas to try communicating with your officers on a personal level a little more and work with them as much as you direct them. These men and women are obviously working hard to serve you, at least at the moment, and your professional objectives seem to be successful, as statistics show. However, without respect and admiration from your officers it is our fear that you will not always get the full dedication from this department that our community deserves. Please accept this as critical advice from concerned citizens that hope your success in Nashville crime suppression continues to grow and that you have a long, productive, and supported career here.

Community Action

We would like to remind everyone of the importance of their own role within the process of keeping crime under control. As a community, we need to remember that our Metro officers are in place to serve and protect, but without community interaction, their reach is limited. We encourage each community member to interact with police officers and to participate in community programs that protect and develop strong foundations for our youth.

Grand Jury Process

We would like to make some suggestions for the Grand Jury process that we feel would make it a stronger and more beneficial process. We learned much during our tenure as jurors concerning how the police department and the court system works and how individuals could assist /volunteer in some of these programs. We would like to suggest that the Grand Jury be used in a way to educate the public on how they could assist. In addition, the more thorough training and education the jury members have, the more information they can share within their community concerning these opportunities.

We request that two straight chairs without armrests be placed in the Grand Jury room to accommodate the officers and other individuals who come before the body. Also, we are requesting that a paper shredder be placed in the Grand Jury room.

CONCLUSION

During our term, 864 cases were presented before the body. Of these cases, 843 were voted "A True Bill" and 21 were voted "A No True Bill".

Once again, we would like to thank Judge Wyatt for the opportunity to serve as Grand Jurors. We have learned and benefited immeasurably from the three-month tenure.


Ranae Aakre


Evelyn McCormick


Latoya Goins

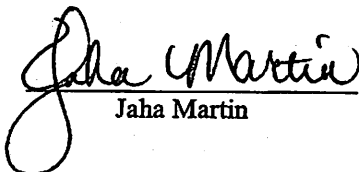

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