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March 20, 1997

Judge Thomas H. Shriver
Criminal Court Division #1
601 Metro Courthouse
Nashville, TN 37201

Dear Judge Shriver:

I understand it is customary for each Grand Jury to report to the appointing Judge in the form of a letter from the Foreman. The January Grand Jury has been blessed with twelve people who have served their community well. It is truly a great group of citizens.

You told me we would become great friends in the process of meeting three mornings a week for three months. You were right about that.

When a group of lawabiding citizens is provided with a broad picture of crime in their community, they focus on what is obvious. Our observations led us to be concerned about the following:

We estimate that perhaps 80 - 85% of the crimes presented to us were related to the use and sale of illegal drugs -- particularly crack cocaine. The community does not seem to have a plan that is working to solve this problem. We believe it gets worse all the time as young people become addicted and then have to sell the drug to support their habit.

Without effective drug treatment for addicts, jail time does not seem to change anything. We were pleased to see what promises to be more effective drug treatment carried out at the new CCA jail. If drug treatment is effective, it makes no sense to jail any addict without the treatment.

It's too bad an addict must be arrested and found guilty of a crime before he or she can get treatment for drug addiction. If outpatient treatment works, it would be a bargain to fund outpatient treatment for addicts.

We are concerned that jail may not be an unpleasant experience for some people. We hope they won't make it too comfortable at the jail. We note that jail is a clean place with three square meals a day, hot showers, and free medical and dental care. That may not be punishment for some people. As Br'er Rabbit said, "Please don't fling me in the brier patch."

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Everyone was concerned with the short jail sentences for repeat offenders. We see criminals with records that stretch ten feet on computer paper. We say, "Why wasn't that man in jail when he committed the crime?" We saw too much of that. If we could find some answer to the crack cocaine problem, there would be room in the jails for the hardened criminal.

We have been very favorable impressed with the majority of people who work in the criminal justice system. We met some very impressive police officers. And, the DA's employees we met were all impressive people.

It has to be relatively unrewarding to work in the criminal justice system and feel that you are losing the war. In Vietnam, we won every battle and lost the war. That may be happening in our criminal justice system. Police officers chase the same people year after year. There comes a time when repeat offenders should be put away for good. We were under the impression that was already true until we saw that hardened criminals with lengthy criminal records must be arrested again and again.

No one is satisfied with the criminal treatment given to juveniles in our county. The word is out that you can get by with just about anything if you are a juvenile. Drug pushers use juveniles for that reason. Something should be done to change that.

We are proud of the job our police force is doing. We commend the District Attorney's office for the efficient way they handle an increasing and, perhaps, over-bearing work load.

We feel that we have all benefited by this experience.

Sincerely,



Thomas W. Cook, Jr.
Foreman January Grand Jury