

Davidson County Grand Jury Final Report

January - March, 2012

Judge Steve Dozier

Division I

Presented March 30, 2012

We, the Davidson County Grand Jurors for the 1st quarter term of 2012, submit the following report of the last 3 months in which we have served. We all believe we now possess a knowledge of our judicial system that would not have been possible without serving on this Grand Jury. All jurors leave with a positive outlook on our judicial system and have a greater respect for our police force.

This Grand Jury heard 918 cases over the past three months. We sent to criminal court 907 True Bills. We returned 11 No True Bills. We heard two special cases by citizens of Davidson County.

Over the course of our term, we were lead by Foreperson, Stan Fossick. Stan's experience with the Grand Jury process helped us deal with the cases in a well balanced manner. He helped keep the reports moving in a timely manner explaining to the presenter that we had heard enough or asking the appropriate questions to help us further understand the case. We soon learned what Stan was looking for in a case and soon started asking the questions ourselves. The hardest part of being on the Grand Jury was to not play judge. That is, it was not our responsibility to determine guilt or innocence but to determine if there was probable cause. We soon came to realize our responsibilities.

The first few gatherings were informative sessions from different organizations within our police force...

Drug Task Force:

Many of us found the Drug Task Force division to be quite interesting. We've all heard of a kilo of cocaine. But had any of us ever actually held one? Or did we know how meth was manufactured? We now know the process and understand the threat to society. The variety of drugs, including prescription drugs, was quite mind boggling to us all. The majority of our cases had drug involvement which was quite concerning. Prescription drugs seem prevalent in all walks of life. We wonder if there is some system for pharmacies to interact with each other to know who is buying what drugs and how often?

Gang Unit:

This Grand Jury learned that gangs really do exist in Nashville. They may not be as big a threat to our city as other cities, but they are definitely out there and Nashville citizens need to be aware of them.

Learning about gang colors, clothing and symbols was eye opening. Kudos to those police officers who spend their shifts dealing with gangs and all their issues.

Domestic Violence and Child Abuse:

Domestic violence and child abuse is more prevalent than any of us thought. Both have no geographic or economic boundaries. Defining child abuse is not all about beating or physically harming a child. We learned that neglect is part of child abuse and neglect doesn't just mean leaving a small child at home alone. For example, there was the couple who did not take their son or daughter to the hospital for burns for close to a week. We all asked "why"? To the jury, taking a child to the hospital seemed like a normal thing to do.

Hearing (and seeing pictures) of child abuse and domestic violence was tough on us all. Domestic violence and child abuse are tough crimes to catch/prosecute due to spouses, children or partners not wanting to come forth. We think education is the first place to start in deterring abuse. Violence can go on in a home for many generations and in order to prevent the act it seems logical that we must educate our young children that beating up (physically or mentally) on each other is not acceptable. As with many issues, it will take time to overcome what has been done for so many years. The jury also feels that tougher punishment for repeat offenders is in order.

Sex Crimes:

Sex Crimes definitely caught our attention. Prostitution stings, undercover operations, etc. We heard a variety. To those men and women who serve on these units, more power to you. There are some demented people out there.

The Grand Jury took several field trips. We felt like school age children again! Only this time we were dealing with real world issues and finding out how our police, judicial, and penal systems work.

Metro Training Academy:

We were all very impressed with this facility. The training program for our future police men and women was educational for us all. The length of the program, the extent of legal knowledge, and the physical abilities the candidates must demonstrate before they can graduate makes us, this Grand Jury, very proud of our officers in blue.

We were also impressed with the K-9 unit. With most of us being dog lovers, we really enjoyed seeing these great animals in action. The officers explained to us how the dogs are used and when and why they would be called into a situation. It is also nice to know that when a dog retires he/she goes home with their handler.

The visit to the aviation unit was informative. Unfortunately we did not get to go up for a bird's eye view of Nashville. However, we learned that two of our helicopters were purchased with confiscated drug money, one was with tax dollars and the remaining came from the U.S. Military. Having the use of an overhead "eye" in searches for criminals is a plus for our police force. As we all know, the maintenance and manpower to operate these machines is quite expensive and we hope that our future governing officials will continue to support this part of our police force.

Juvenile Court:

Our visit to Juvenile Court was very educational. This facility, located near LP Field, is somewhat new. As jurors, we met with Judge Green in the court room for an informational tour of what happens in the juvenile court system. We were informed that all child custody cases are handled thru this court as well as criminal violations by juveniles. This court also determines if a case can be bound over to adult criminal court if so deemed necessary.

Our tour of the facility took us through the building. Most of us came into this tour with the thoughts that it is a long term facility. Not true! It's a temporary holding area until the juveniles are released to their parents or guardians. Or for major crimes committed by juveniles, trials are held in a timely manner in order to expedite their innocence or their punishment.

The facility is very functional. Several of our jurors felt some type of roofing is needed for the outdoor area so the area can be used during inclement or very hot weather. There were other jurors who felt the juveniles are there for such a short time that part of their punishment is that they don't get to enjoy the outdoors. We definitely got the feeling that the staff of the facility would like to see some sort of roof for the facility's outdoor area.

Shoot Don't Shoot:

This trip to the Training Academy was probably our most "fun". The "video game" atmosphere was lively and encouraging. We realize from this exercise that our police force has to be aware and alert in a 360° field at all times. The scenarios were engaging and made your adrenaline flow. We somewhat understand what our men and women officers have to deal with in their profession but will never know the true extent.

Comstat:

We spent one morning viewing the proceedings of the precincts weekly meeting. Most jurors came away with a greater sense of knowledge of just how our police force is structured.

Drug Court 4:

Wow, what a great program! Many thanks to Judge Norman for developing this program and continuing to oversee it. What most of us don't understand is why other cities don't embrace this program? With a success rate of 60% and with a reduced cost of incarceration, it seems to be a win-win situation for everyone. Our law makers need to embrace and support this facility. Rehabilitating non-violent drug offenders is a positive mark for our city. Drugs affect all walks of life and unfortunately even the best of people can become drug offenders. This program gives those who want to re-enter the real world another chance. The Grand Jurors feel this is a "star" program for Nashville.

Ride Alongs:

Several of our members took advantage of this opportunity to see what a policeman's day/night is really like. One member actually attended a booking which added to his knowledge of the entire process.

These jurors would recommend to future jurors to take advantage of this opportunity.

Riverbend:

Due to the new administration's policy about tours of the prison, we were only able to have a briefing of the facility and a tour of death row. Grand Juries in the past have actually gotten to see the cell blocks and other parts of the prison. If the current administration continues with this policy we feel it is probably a waste of time to travel to Riverbend. Part of the criminal justice system is the penal system. According to our briefing of the prison, we have a very well run and respected facility. But since we did not get to tour it, we can only go on what's been told to us. We hope that future Grand Juries will be given the full tour.

We'd like to thank some folks who helped us understand why we serve and what our lawmakers do to make our city a better place.

District Attorney Tory Johnson:

Mr. Johnson started our service with an overview of the criminal court system and where the jury fits into the total process. His explanations enabled us to begin our journey with knowledge of the system. As the weeks rolled by, we more and more understood what the DA's office and the Grand Jury are charged with doing.

Chief of Police Steve Anderson and Mayor Karl Dean:

The Grand Jury would like to thank these two individuals for taking time out of their busy days to talk with us. Both were very articulate that Nashville is an up and coming city with many great things about to happen. But in order for Nashville to market itself to tourists, visitors, businesses and future residents, we have to show that we have a government that supports education, safety, and the overall well being of Nashvillians and our guests. This Grand Jury feels the mayor and chief are on the right track.

David Liles:

How do you describe this individual? Patient, caring, thorough, funny, well prepared... The process of having one person present the majority of cases not only saves time and money but allows our officers to remain on the streets doing their jobs. Thanks to David we made it through the majority of our cases...drugs, DUI's, etc in a timely manner.

General Thoughts...

The high number of drug, DUI, and revoked license cases was astounding. It seems our courts are bogged down with too many repeat offenders. The Grand Jury was also appalled to see so many repeat offenders in assault and burglary cases. How do these people get back on the streets? How does the criminal system deal with this? Harsher sentences? Rehabilitation? Our lawmakers have to continue to work towards helping our criminal justice system be effective. One other concern was the number of what seemed to be misdemeanor cases. Does our criminal court system have time for these? It seems General Sessions should work diligently to resolve these cases and not let them get to the criminal system.

On a non-judicial/criminal note...Parking was an issue on several occasions. Even though there are plenty of designated parking spaces along Bank Alley, there were many days when jurors had to park elsewhere (and be reimbursed) due to non authorized cars parked in the designated spaces. Towing of these cars was sometimes difficult.

In Closing:

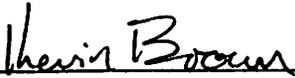
Thanks to all those who have helped us through this process. Special thanks to Stan Fossick for his leadership, kind spirit, and donuts! We have all bonded during this experience. We came in on January 9th not knowing each other but we soon became comfortable and learned about each other's families, where we lived and where we worked (or not). We had moments of humor, sympathy, sadness, and disbelief, but most of all we came to respect each other as Grand Jurors. Some of us were not sure about serving on this 3 month jury. But as Judge Dozier told us on the first day, we would not regret it. And of course, he was right.

We all agree that serving on the Grand Jury has opened our eyes to crimes in our city and how hard our police force works to make our city safe. Thank you to all who serve. This Grand Jury has been proud to serve Davidson County.

And to all future Grand Jurors, embrace the 90 day service.

“Oscar says, ‘Grand Jury Rules!’”

Respectfully Submitted, March 30, 2012
Jan. - March 2012 Grand Jurors


Kevin Brown

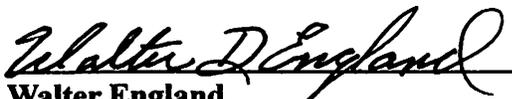

Carolyn Preston


William (Terry) Dixon


John (Lee) Smith


Cynthia Ellis


Barton Wilson

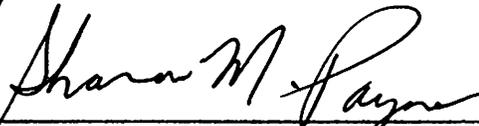

Walter England


Helen (Tiffany) Wilken


Oscar Hill

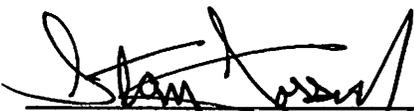

Brandon Moses - Alternate


Michele Horton


Sharon Payne - Alternate


Sharon Oldham


Lara Stevison - Alternate


Stan Fossick, Foreperson