

Final Report of the Davidson County Grand Jury

April Term 2026

(April 7, 2026 – June 18, 2026)

Criminal Court, Division IV

Judge Jennifer Smith

Foreperson: Mary Moody

Davidson County, Tennessee

I. Overview of the Term

The Davidson County Grand Jury convened during the April Term 2026, meeting weekly on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from April 7 through June 18. Our panel was composed of a diverse cross-section of Davidson County citizens, representing a range of ages, backgrounds, and life experiences. Each juror understood and embraced the weight of their civic responsibility.

Serving on the Grand Jury provided this panel with an extraordinary window into the Nashville criminal justice system — one that deepened our respect for those who work within it and sharpened our concern about the patterns we witnessed. We approached each case with care, asking questions when the evidence required it, consulting with the Assistant District Attorney when charges raised legal questions, and deliberating with the seriousness that each decision demanded. Where we believed the facts supported additional charges, we worked with the ADAs to ensure indictments were complete and just. Where we believed the interest of justice would not be served, we did not return a True Bill.

We are grateful for the privilege of serving and submit this report in the hope that our observations and recommendations will contribute to a safer, more just Nashville.

II. Case Information

During this term, the Grand Jury deliberated on the following:

- 997 – total cases heard
- 993 – True Bills returned
- 4 – No True Bills

The cases presented this term included:

- Domestic Violence and Aggravated Assault
- Driving Under the Influence (DUI)
- Sexual Assault and Crimes Against Children
- Murder and Homicide
- Robbery, Burglary, and Theft
- Felony Possession of a Weapon
- Drug-Related Offenses

Cases were presented primarily by Sgt. Michael Spencer of the Metro Nashville Police Department, whose professionalism and clarity were invaluable to our deliberations. We also had a week with Det. Nate Ellsworth. Det. Ellsworth was thorough, warm, and informative and a good replacement for Sgt. Spencer. We also received presentations from agents of TDOC, MACC, the State Troopers, the Goodlettsville police department, Belle Meade police department, and retail stores' loss prevention personnel, among others.

III. Educational Activities

To deepen our understanding of the criminal justice system and the resources available to victims and defendants alike, our panel participated in several educational presentations during the first weeks of our term.

Guest Speakers

During our term, we heard from the following guest speakers:

- General Glenn Funk, Metro Nashville District Attorney
- Josh Beauchesne, Detective, Metro Nashville Police Department – Domestic Violence Division
- John Grubbs, Detective, Metro Nashville Police Department – Youth Services
- Leanna Dugan, Our Kids
- John Drake, Chief of the Metro Nashville Police Department
- Amanda Sweet, Forensic Services Division Director, MNPD Crime Lab

These presentations were valuable in contextualizing the cases we heard throughout the term. We were particularly grateful for ADA Jay Martin’s willingness to be available to us for legal guidance, and for Sgt. Spencer’s consistent, professional case presentations.

One area where the educational component fell short was in the presentation on domestic violence. We address this directly in our Key Concerns section below, as we believe it has direct implications for the quality of grand jury deliberations.

IV. Key Concerns of the Grand Jury

1. Domestic Violence — Strangulation as a Starting Point, Not an Escalation

The Grand Jury was deeply alarmed by both the volume and severity of domestic violence cases presented this term. The majority of these cases involved strangulation — not as an escalation of prior violence, but as the initial act. These were not cases where abuse had gradually worsened over time until a line was crossed. These were cases where a person chose strangulation as a first response.

Research consistently identifies non-fatal strangulation as one of the strongest predictors of domestic homicide. Victims who have been strangled by an intimate partner are significantly more likely to be killed by that partner than those who have not. The Grand Jury urges the District Attorney’s Office and the Metro Nashville Police Department to treat strangulation in a domestic context with the urgency this evidence demands. These are not simply assault cases. They are warning signs of potential homicide.

Prior Grand Juries have raised concerns about domestic violence volume and repeat offenders. This Grand Jury documents a more specific and alarming pattern: the violence being presented to us begins at a level of severity that prior reports have not explicitly named. We ask that decision-makers read this finding with the gravity it deserves.

2. Domestic Violence — A Systemic Charging Gap

Of equal concern to this Grand Jury was a recurring and systemic failure in the charging of domestic violence cases. Throughout the term — from the first week to the last — the Grand Jury found it necessary to add the domestic violence enhancement to indictments at a rate of approximately ten additional charges per week. This was not a phase of the term. It was a consistent pattern.

This matters because the domestic violence designation is not merely a label. It carries significant legal consequences: enhanced sentencing ranges, different bond considerations, access to victim protection resources, eligibility for Orders of Protection, and how recidivism is tracked across the system. When the

domestic violence enhancement is omitted at the charging stage, those protections are delayed or denied to victims at their most vulnerable moment.

The Grand Jury is aware that in many of these cases, the violent nature of the act — strangulation — made the domestic context evident even without the enhancement on the indictment. The fact that the enhancement was still being omitted suggests this is a structural issue in the charging process, not a matter of individual oversight.

The Grand Jury makes the following recommendations regarding domestic violence charging:

1. The District Attorney's Office should conduct an immediate audit of its charging protocols for cases involving strangulation in a domestic relationship context, with particular attention to whether the domestic violence enhancement is being applied consistently before cases reach the Grand Jury.
2. The District Attorney's Office should implement mandatory training for prosecutors and law enforcement liaisons on the application of the domestic violence enhancement, to ensure it is treated as a core component of complete and just charging — not as supplemental paperwork.
3. The Grand Jury strongly encourages the District Attorney's Office to recognize that the domestic violence designation reflects the full reality of what victims have experienced and the full scope of the law's protections. Its routine omission is not a minor procedural gap. It is a failure of the system to see victims completely.

3. Domestic Violence — Failures in Electronic Monitoring

The Grand Jury heard cases involving defendants on electronic monitoring (ankle monitors) who nonetheless committed further acts of domestic violence. Our observations raised serious concerns about how the current monitoring system functions — and who it is designed to protect.

Under the current system, when a monitored defendant enters a proximity exclusion zone, the alert goes to the victim. The Grand Jury finds this deeply troubling. A domestic violence victim should not be required to serve as the first line of response to a monitoring violation. In many cases, by the time a victim receives such an alert, the danger is already present. The purpose of electronic monitoring in a domestic violence context should be to prevent contact and alert authorities before harm occurs — not to notify victims after a boundary has already been breached.

Additionally, the Grand Jury was made aware that when an ankle monitor battery dies, no alert is generated. A device that goes silent is indistinguishable, from the system's perspective, from a device that is functioning. This is a significant gap that creates a window of unmonitored time with no accountability.

The Grand Jury recommends:

1. That proximity violation alerts be routed directly to law enforcement authorities in real time, rather than — or in addition to — being sent to victims.
2. That the monitoring system be configured to generate an automatic alert to supervising authorities when a device battery falls below a critical threshold or goes offline, so that compliance can be verified before monitoring lapses entirely.

4. Repeat Offenders — A Disconnect Across Bond, Plea, and Sentencing

A significant portion of the violent crimes reviewed by this Grand Jury involved repeat offenders — individuals with documented prior criminal histories who were nonetheless free on bond, sometimes on cases directly related to their prior conduct. This raised a concern this Grand Jury was unable to fully

resolve: when repeat violent offenders continue to reoffend, is the failure one of bond-setting, plea agreements, sentencing, or all three?

The Grand Jury does not have full visibility into every stage of the process, and we recognize that bond, plea, and sentencing decisions involve legal constraints and considerations beyond what we see in the Grand Jury room. However, the pattern we observed — repeat violent offenders appearing before us on new charges while on bond for prior ones — suggests a systemic disconnect somewhere in the chain. We urge those with authority at each stage of this process to examine whether current practices are adequately protecting the community from individuals with demonstrated patterns of violent behavior.

We also echo the recommendation made by prior Grand Juries: bonds for violent offenses, and particularly for domestic violence cases involving repeat offenders, should reflect the danger posed to victims and the community.

5. DUI — Alarming Blood Alcohol Levels

The Grand Jury received a presentation from Amanda Sweet, Director of the MNPDP Crime Lab, which we found both informative and deeply alarming. Davidson County is the only county in Tennessee with its own dedicated crime lab, and the expertise of its staff was evident throughout.

However, the data presented on DUI cases gave this Grand Jury serious pause. A significant number of DUI cases reviewed this term involved blood alcohol content (BAC) readings exceeding 0.20 — measured hours after the time of the traffic stop. The Grand Jury notes that BAC decreases at approximately 0.015 per hour following the cessation of drinking. A reading of 0.20 or above taken two or three hours after a stop represents a BAC that was substantially higher — potentially 0.23, 0.25, or more — at the moment these individuals chose to get behind the wheel.

These are not borderline cases. These are not individuals who misjudged a single drink. The frequency with which this Grand Jury encountered cases of profound impairment was sobering. We are genuinely concerned about the safety of every person traveling Nashville's roads, and we strongly encourage the District Attorney's Office and MNPDP to treat high-BAC DUI cases with the prosecutorial priority their danger warrants. We further encourage the Metropolitan Council to examine whether current penalties serve as an adequate deterrent given the patterns this Grand Jury witnessed.

6. MPD Crime Lab — A Documented Pattern of Unresolved Backlog

The Grand Jury wishes to document a concern that has now appeared in multiple consecutive Davidson County Grand Jury reports: the MPD Crime Lab backlog and the resulting delays in evidence processing. Medical-legal exam results have been delayed by as much as two years. Rape kit processing backlogs have exceeded nine months. The sexual abuse division is limited to five expedited processing requests per month. Even when evidence is contracted to third-party labs, Metro Lab must verify the results, adding further time to an already unacceptable timeline.

This Grand Jury acknowledges the expertise and dedication of the Crime Lab staff, including Director Sweet, who presented to us with evident professionalism and commitment. The backlog is not a failure of individuals. It is a failure of institutional prioritization and resource allocation.

What this Grand Jury must state plainly is this: this issue has been raised by at least four consecutive Davidson County Grand Juries. The recommendations have been consistent — more staffing, more funding, more resources. There is no evidence these recommendations have been implemented. Victims continue to wait for justice while suspects remain free on bond. This is not an acceptable status quo.

The Grand Jury renews and escalates the call of prior juries:

1. The Metropolitan Council must allocate dedicated, sufficient funding for additional Crime Lab personnel in the FY2027 budget cycle, with a specific mandate to reduce the current backlog.
2. The Mayor's Office and Metro Nashville Police Department must develop and publish a specific, measurable plan to address the backlog, including interim benchmarks and a timeline for resolution.
3. The Grand Jury asks that the response to this recommendation — or the absence of a response — be documented and made available to future Grand Juries so that the accountability record is clear.

V. Grand Jury Process Recommendations

In addition to substantive concerns arising from the cases we heard, this Grand Jury wishes to document several recommendations regarding the Grand Jury process itself. Some of these echo prior sessions; we note them here because they remain unaddressed.

Domestic Violence Educational Presentation

The Grand Jury appreciated Detective Beauchesne's presentation on domestic violence and recognizes his expertise and dedication to this work. However, we recommend that future Grand Juries receive a more substantive educational experience on the psychological and physical reality of domestic violence victimization — specifically covering trauma bonding, coercive control, and the complex reasons why victims frequently return to or maintain contact with their abusers.

This is not merely an academic concern. During our deliberations, jurors raised questions about victim behavior — including why a victim might return to an abusive partner — that reflect gaps in understanding which a more robust presentation could address. A juror who does not understand why victims return may unconsciously weigh that fact against the strength of a case, introducing bias into deliberations that affects justice outcomes.

We recommend that the educational presentation on domestic violence include input from a victim advocate, a mental health professional, or a representative from a domestic violence advocacy organization such as SafeHaven of Tennessee, who can speak to the lived experience of victims with the depth and nuance this subject requires.

Stand-In Presenter Preparedness

The Grand Jury, echoing concerns raised by the April–June 2025 Grand Jury, wishes to note that when a stand-in presenter appears in place of the original investigating officer, the quality of case presentation can suffer significantly. In several instances this term, stand-in presenters were unable to answer basic questions about the cases they were presenting, responding with “I don't know” to questions that were central to the probable cause determination.

The Grand Jury's ability to fulfill its function depends on the quality of the information presented to it. We recommend that stand-in presenters be required to familiarize themselves adequately with each case before presenting, and that supervisory personnel establish minimum preparation standards for stand-in presentations.

Video and Photo Evidence

The Grand Jury found video and photographic evidence to be among the most helpful tools available during deliberations. Where it was presented, it significantly accelerated our ability to assess probable cause. We recommend that law enforcement witnesses be strongly encouraged to bring available video and photo

evidence to Grand Jury presentations whenever it exists, rather than summarizing what they observed. Showing is more effective than telling, and it allows the Grand Jury to fulfill its independent function more effectively.

Grand Jury Orientation

This Grand Jury adds its voice to those of the October 2025 and January 2026 Grand Juries in recommending that 1–2 full days of dedicated orientation be provided at the beginning of each term. This orientation should include an overview of common charges and their elements, a review of Grand Jury procedures and probable cause standards, and an opportunity to tour relevant facilities before case deliberations begin. A well-oriented jury is a more effective jury, and the investment of time at the outset pays dividends throughout the term.

VI. Acknowledgments

The Grand Jury wishes to express sincere gratitude to the following individuals whose professionalism, guidance, and dedication made this term possible:

- Foreperson Mary Moody, whose experience as a retired attorney was invaluable to this panel. Her legal knowledge, steady leadership, and commitment to thorough and fair deliberation elevated the quality of our work throughout the term.
- Sgt. Michael Spencer, whose consistent, clear, and professional case presentations were a model of what this process should look like. His willingness to answer questions and provide clarification ensured that our deliberations were informed and efficient.
- ADA Jay Martin and the District Attorney’s Office staff, for their legal guidance and responsiveness throughout the term.
- Det. Melody Saxon for her dogged determination to justice in the Non-Lethal Shooting Division.
- Shanté Piché, Secretary to this Grand Jury, for managing the complex record-keeping and reporting that is required to document its work. Ms. Piché was meticulous in maintaining the voluminous records that are essential to the Grand Jury process, assuring the work of the Grand Jury is properly reflected in the records of the court system.

Finally, we thank the citizens of Davidson County for the opportunity to serve. This experience has deepened our understanding of the challenges facing Nashville’s criminal justice system — and our conviction that those challenges can and must be addressed.

Grand Jury Report

April Term 2026

April 7, 2026 – June 18, 2026

Foreperson

/s/ Mary Moody/s/
Mary Moody, Foreperson

Regular Grand Jurors

/s/ Shanté Piché/s/ Shanté Piché, Secretary

/s/ Sarah Berrios/s/ Sarah Berrios

/s/ Donya Coffee-Page/s/ Donya Coffee-Page

/s/ Craig Gonce/s/ Craig Gonce

/s/ Michael Harris/s/ Michael Harris

/s/ Nichole Holloway-Smithson/s/ Nichole Holloway-Smithson

/s/ Shirl Jackson/s/ Shirl Jackson

/s/ Trinity Miller/s/ Trinity Miller

/s/ Richard Pecararo/s/ Richard Pecararo

/s/ Siobhan Polk/s/ Siobhan Polk

/s/ James Rieniets/s/ James Rieniets

/s/ Dyson Schaible/s/ Dyson Schaible

/s/ Anna Sellers/s/ Anna Sellers

Alternate Grand Jurors

/s/ Lavonda Bell/s/

Lavonda Bell

/s/ Haley Hawkins /s/

Haley Hawkins

/s/ Chelsea Henderson /s/

Chelsea Henderson

/s/ Sherry Mocerri/s/

Shery Mocerri

/s/ Rosemary Ramsey/s/

Rosemary Ramsey

/s/ Bailey Riggs /s/

Bailey Riggs

/s/ Joshua Smith /s/

Joshua Smith

/s/ Elizabeth Weiss/s/

Elizabeth Weiss