

# **Davidson County Grand Jury**

**July Term, 2022**

**Judges Mark Fishburn, retired mid-session, and Cynthia Chappell**

**Criminal Court Div. VI**

**Foreman: Parker Toler**

The Davidson County Grand Jury heard cases on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8:30am to approximately 12:30pm between July 13th and September 22nd, 2022. Detectives, investigators, special agents, and community security personnel presented many cases to the Grand Jury, with Sergeant Michael Fisher presenting the majority of the cases on behalf of Metro Nashville Police Department. Detective Nate Ellsworth presented M.N.P.D. cases when Sgt. Fisher was unavailable. Consolidating presentation of many M.N.P.D. cases to one presenter minimized disruption of the daily duties of Metro Nashville Police Officers and expedited presentations to the Grand Jury.

Grand Jurors heard a total of 662 cases during their entire term. All direct presentments to the Grand Jury resulted in direct indictments. All but one case resulted in a true bill, indicating that only incidents with sufficient to abundant evidence were presented to the grand jury.

## **Regular Grand Jurors**

Phyllis Y. Brown, Secretary

Ashley H. Cantrell, Reporter

Albert R. Morton, Sergeant at Arms

Carol A. Dillon-Totten

LaChristle M. Greer

Benita F. Hassell

Chanelle R. Matthews

Carrie S. Hartman McDowell

Brittany L. Pharr

Kiran Rangaraj

Selekia M. Shaw

Paul D. Lux, served a partial term.

Rachel L. Wagner - alternate juror replaced Paul Lux as a regular juror mid-session.

### Alternate Grand Jurors

Kathryn R. Collingwood

Sonya Edwards

Irucka A. Embry

Derrick D. G. Guinn

Ashton V. Hunt

Margaret L. Sanguinetti

Patrick J. Simpson

James L. Strohmeier

John M. Tierney

Tameka C. Walker

Ashley N. Westby

Annabel G. Yates

### Grand Jury Concerns

**Increasing Rate of Violent Crime:** The rate of violent crime in Davidson County increased 76.9% from 2020 to 2021, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. In 2020, the violent crime rate per 100,000 Davidson County residents was 606.6. In 2021, the number of violent crimes per 100,000 Davidson County residents was 1,073. If the current trend for violent crimes in 2022 continues, the final 2022 numbers will be much higher than those of 2021.

**Low Bonds for Career, Violent Offenders:** The Grand Jury was shocked at how many violent offenders were out on bond only to commit horrific murders, aggravated assaults, and other violent crimes. Some of these career criminals had been convicted of dozens of violent crimes in their past, including homicides, yet they were out on bond. In the interest of keeping Davidson County residents safe, bonds must be raised for career, violent offenders. As an example, one incident presented by Detective Mariah Iles involved a career criminal and convicted murderer, who was out on bond. He shot eight people, including several children. One child was shot 13 times. A next-door neighbor was hit by a stray bullet, while asleep in her bedroom. The offender killed three people that day, including two children and his own accomplice. Raise the bonds for violent, repeat offenders.

**Stop Plea Bargaining with Sex Offenders:** When a sex offender is caught with hundreds, thousands, or more than tens-of-thousands of videos and images of child porn, don't offer a plea bargain. A jury deserves to hear those cases.

**Repeated Violations of Orders of Protection:** When an offender repeatedly violates Orders of Protection, he or she should have to pay increasingly expensive penalties and be met with increasingly harsher consequences. Maybe then they will stop harassing their victims.

**Crime Lab Staffing Shortages and Processing Delays:** Delays in processing evidence result when the crime lab is understaffed. Forensic analysts require specialized training and qualified technicians are in short supply. Lab technicians are leaving these labs. Backlogs result because Davidson County does not have enough technicians to process the large volume of evidence that needs to be processed. As a result, some criminals remain free to continue offending. Please develop an incentive for training crime lab technicians to fill those available positions. Work with high schools, colleges, and universities to develop incentives for students to pursue careers as crime lab technicians, and consider increasing their pay to make up for inflationary increases in the cost of living.

**Homeless Encampments:** Allowing homeless encampments to exist is neither kind, nor caring. Homeless encampments are a hazard to their occupants: the men, women, children, and pets who live in unsanitary, dangerous conditions. Local businesses and communities are negatively impacted by the increased crime, pollution, open drug use, drug-dealing, intoxication and loitering. Piles of trash and human waste litter these encampments. Dogs are left tied to trees. Crime is common in these encampments. Dead rats, discarded needles, trash and human waste accumulate and much of it ends up polluting the Cumberland River. Children should not have to live in such places, neither should adults with special needs. These encampments simply must be disbanded immediately for the safety and dignity of the occupants themselves, the citizens of Davidson County, the welfare of animals, and the local environment.

The Grand Jury is neither suggesting that all homeless people are criminals, nor that all criminals are homeless. However, the link is undeniable. Many homeless people suffer from undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues, addiction, alcoholism, or simply lack the ability to safely and independently care for themselves. They need mental health evaluations and services, medication supervision, safe and supervised housing, and accountability. They are frequently victims of the criminals living within their midst. Unfortunately, many homeless people don't want any kind of housing at all, no matter how nice the accommodations.

One of the many cases the Grand Jury heard involving homeless offenders and victims featured a machete-wielding homeless man, who terrorized a nearby business before nearly killing two fellow homeless people. Immediately after the attack, he carjacked a mother and teenage daughter, who fled their car. The man then tried to run over the teenager. Another case involved a young homeless man, who shot and killed a man on a bus for not giving up his window seat.

Nashville has become a desired destination for homeless people in America, since Nashville offers a multitude of services. Many organizations offer housing support as well as a variety of support services for the homeless population in Davidson County, including food banks, free rides to medical appointments, mental health counseling, and financial counseling. A website and resource guide, Where to Turn in Nashville, [www.win.org](http://www.win.org), lists such services.

Unsurprisingly, crime increases when homelessness increases. Between 22% and 23% of individuals arrested in Davidson County are homeless, according to Sheriff Daron Hall.

**Fentanyl Proliferation and Overdose Deaths:** The Grand Jury commends Police Chief John Drake for establishing the Neighborhood Safety Unit within the Specialized Investigations Division of MNPd. The Neighborhood Safety Unit, headed by Sergeant Mike Hotz, investigates drug overdose deaths. An offender who sells a deadly Schedule I or II drug to someone who overdoses can be charged with 2nd Degree Murder if that drug is the proximal cause of their death. Proximal cause means the victim would not have died if the drug was not in their system.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more powerful than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. The Grand Jury learned that one sugar packet worth of fentanyl (one gram) contains enough fentanyl to kill 500 people. China and India ship 55-gallon drums of fentanyl's primary ingredient, 4ANPP, to Mexican drug cartels, who then mix it with four additional chemicals to make the final product, fentanyl. Once they make the fentanyl, cartels move it across the southern border to sell to children and recreational drug users. Fentanyl overdose deaths are now affecting both first time and long-term drug users.

Marijuana is a common recreational drug that is now being laced with fentanyl. Recreational drug users purchase what they think is a different drug, like Percocet or Xanax, not realizing they are actually consuming pills that are 100% fentanyl. Rainbow fentanyl looks like candy and is marketed to children; it has been found in 21 states as of September, 2022. On September 23rd, 2022 the Phoenix Police Department reported the seizure of more than one million fentanyl pills. During 2021, 725 people died from overdose deaths in Davidson County...all from fentanyl. No heroin or cocaine overdose deaths occurred. In 2022, fentanyl overdose deaths will eclipse that of 2021. According to the CDC, fentanyl deaths are the leading cause of death for those in the 18 to 45 year age range.

The Grand Jury is concerned that fentanyl could easily be used as a weapon of mass destruction in Davidson County.

**Addiction, Crime, and Education:** According to Sheriff Daron Hall, 99% of offenders in custody are addicted to drugs, alcohol, or both. If that percentage is accurate (the Grand Jury has no reason to doubt it) significant efforts should be directed toward reducing the likelihood that Davidson County children become drug users or alcoholics. It may be too late to reach many of the adults, but hope exists for the children. Education is a powerful tool; use it.

Schools, Churches, and Community Organizations should prioritize drug and alcohol education, especially in light of the worsening, deadly epidemic of fentanyl. Perhaps, Sergeant Mike Hotz and Police Chief Drake could record a brief public service announcement video to be played to children in middle school, high school, colleges, and universities. The video could address the pervasive distribution of fentanyl; rainbow fentanyl and fentanyl masking as a less deadly recreational drugs; how to spot an overdose; how to respond in the event of an overdose; and proper administration of Naloxone (Generic)/Narcan (Brand name) in the event of an overdose. At least that way they have a fighting chance of saving someone's life, possibly their own.

**Poverty and Education:** Breaking the cycle of poverty in low-income neighborhoods would have an empowering, and positive impact on Davidson County and inevitably reduce crime rates. The problem is complicated and multi-factorial, but a few changes to our educational system will help improve opportunities for our at-risk youth. Tennessee Dept. of Education released the results for the 2021-2022 school year showing the proficiency rates for all Metro Nashville Public School students in elementary, middle, and high school. The percentage of MNPS students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations (proficiency) in English Language Arts (ELA) was 27%. For math, the proficiency levels were just 19%. Scores are up slightly from 2021, which reflected a 19% ELA proficiency and an 11% math proficiency. No numbers were provided for 2020, as students were not asked to take the evaluations. Pre-pandemic levels of proficiency in 2019 were 26% for both ELA and math. We are under-educating our children in Public Schools.

Alternate educational opportunities to failing public schools can offer hope for students stuck in a cycle of undereducation, welfare, addiction, and crime. Tax dollars designated for each child's education should follow the student to the school of their choice. Every Davidson County parent should be able to choose where their children attend school, so that they can support those institutions providing the greatest chances of success for their children. Public school teachers are quitting at record high rates, and more public high school students are graduating without meeting proficiency levels in reading, writing, or math. Our public schools are setting many students up for failure. This cannot continue. Students, parents, and our community deserve better.

Providing vocational training during high school may help set some students on a career pathway before they even graduate. College is expensive, time-consuming, and is not the best decision for every student. In fact, Tennessee had one of the America's lowest college graduation rates at 28.2% in 2022. Many vocationally-trained students can enter the work force immediately after high school. They earn enough money to free themselves from the welfare trap and set themselves up for a life of financial stability and success. Such financial stability is empowering and will decrease their likelihood of becoming the victim of crime and of becoming an offender.

In ten years, 40% of America's working class will retire. Americans will struggle to find the experts needed to keep our country functioning. We need our plumbers, carpenters, HVAC repair technicians, electricians, and other working-class experts. Preparing high school students for jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities as tradesmen and women is an important pathway to success. Vocational training has been overshadowed by the message that the only pathway to success is through college. College is right for some students, but certainly not all.

**Crimes Committed by Young Offenders/Fatherlessness:** The Tennessee Bureau of Investigations Crime statistics provide several metrics by which crime statistics can be analyzed, including age, sex, race, ethnicity, even longitude and latitude. One significant metric that is missing is the metric of criminals who grew up in fatherless homes.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 1 in 4 children, or just over 18 million in total, live without any father in the home. Similarly, the US has the highest rate of children living in single-parent households among any country in the world. For black children, the number who grow up in single-parent homes is roughly 6 million—or 64% of the total population.

The effects of this epidemic of fatherlessness span issues ranging from education and health to crime, and so much more. For example:

- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all children with behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.
- Fatherless children are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated.
- 85% of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes.
- 75% of families relying on public housing are led by single women.
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.
- 70% of teen pregnancies happen in fatherless homes.

While the statistics above do not provide definitive, causal proof, fatherlessness is likely a significant contributing factor of many of the problems afflicting society today. This complicated issue has a complicated solution that must involve changes within our own community. Residents of Davidson County must step up and connect with at-risk youth through mentorship programs like Onnie Kirk's Family Foundation Fund (<https://familyfoundationfund.org/>) and Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee (<https://mentorakid.org/>). We must intentionally and consistently teach children that only 2% of people who do the following three things are permanently poor in America:

1. Graduate high school.
2. Get a job.
3. Wait until after marriage to have children.

The first two criteria are fairly easy, but fewer and fewer young people wait until they are married to have children. Unless that changes, poverty and crime will inevitably increase.

### **Grand Jury Recommendations**

- Increase bonds for violent offenders, so they are not out on Davidson County streets reoffending.

- Stop plea bargaining with sex offenders when overwhelming evidence exists. Take those cases to trial and let a jury of 12 Davidson County residents determine the outcome of the case.
- Mayor Cooper and the Continuum of Care Homelessness Planning Council should disband homeless encampments around Davidson County and provide supervised housing, social services, oversight, and accountability for those homeless citizens suffering in plain sight.
- Expand the Behavioral Care Center (BCC) so that this successful program can positively impact the lives of more of Nashville's offenders, whose crimes are strongly influenced by their addictions and undiagnosed/untreated mental health issues. Currently, the BCC can house 30 male and 30 female offenders at a time. At maximum capacity, it is estimated that the facility will impact 1,500-2,000 individuals annually. With a 7% recidivism rate, this program is clearly working; Please expand it.
- Increase penalties each, successive time offenders violate Orders of Protection. The well-being and safety of their victims needs to be a priority.
- Work with educational institutions to promote careers as crime lab technicians.
- Encourage vocational programs, job training, and entrepreneurial programs in high schools as an alternative to college.
- Increase the charge from 2nd Degree Murder to 1st Degree Murder for offenders who sell a deadly Schedule I or II drug to someone who overdoses, if that drug is the proximal cause of their death. Recreational drug users usually have no idea the drugs they are taking may contain enough fentanyl to kill them, but drug dealers certainly do. Send a strong message to would-be drug dealers.
- Davidson County middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities should require fentanyl education sessions each term. Perhaps Sgt. Hotz and Chief Drake could put together a video to be shown in local schools. This education may help deter children from potentially deadly drug overdoses and crimes associated with addiction.
- Please require schools to have multiple Naloxone/Narcan doses available in the event of a single or mass overdose event. Naloxone is a drug that reverses opioid overdoses; this could save the lives of multiple students. Every school and every floor of every college and university dorm should have Naloxone available right next to the fire extinguishers and defibrillation devices.
- Encourage television, social, and print media to issue community service announcements regarding the proliferation of fentanyl and its deadly nature. Use this opportunity to encourage every resident of Davidson County to fill their state-approved prescription for Naloxone in case of emergency.

- Promote long-term mentorship of at-risk youth, whether through existing mentorship programs, utilization of existing facilities, or the creation of new facilities in low-crime areas of town. Volunteers are more likely to connect with at-risk youth where they feel safe. Connections made through such volunteerism may change the trajectory of a child's life for the better and help make Davidson County a safer place to live, work, and visit.

### **Grand Jury Process and Facility Requests**

- The Grand Jury room was hot this session. The fan helped a little, but a properly functioning air conditioning would be better. Provide a portable A/C unit for the grand jury room if the A/C unit is malfunctioning.
- Microphone function was intermittent. Jurors in the back of the room had difficulty hearing some of the presenters.
- Please have an IT assistant available if evidence needs to be presented on the large screen in the Grand Jury room. Detectives, investigators, and Grand Jurors experienced delays when presentation of video evidence was necessary.
- When incidents contain multiple defendants and numerous charges, please differentiate which charges apply to which defendants.
- When defendants are charged with multiple counts, please specify the number of counts of each charge.
- Providing the incident date/date range, names of victims and witnesses would help Grand Jurors sort out the key "players" involved in each incident. Grand jurors struggled to follow the incident narrative when several defendant, victim, and witness first names, last names, nicknames, and pronouns were used interchangeably. Presenters are familiar with the names of those involved with each incident, whereas Grand Jurors are learning about each incident for the first time.
- Have two alternate Grand Jurors present each day, in case regular Grand Jurors arrive late, do not show, or need to leave unexpectedly. This will prevent delays.
- The Grand Jury missed two important speakers on July 21st, namely the General Session Drug Court Judge, Gale Robinson, and Jennifer Smith - Criminal Court Division IV, DC4, because other speakers ran long. If the jury foreman or woman could keep a set schedule of speakers and notify speakers when they have 5 minutes left in their allotted time, the Grand Jury would have been able to hear from all speakers on July 21st. We were able to reschedule Judge Jennifer Smith, but not Judge Gail Robinson.



- Grand Jurors request a microwave and snacks be provided, if possible.
- During the current recession and 40-year high inflation, gas prices are high. Consider increasing the reimbursement Grand Jurors receive to make up for the cost of gasoline.

### Grand Jury Speakers

During the first two and a half weeks, various presenters spoke to the Grand Jury about their areas of specialization. The following is a list of our daily presenters:

- July 13th, 2022: Jay Martin - ADA, Grand Jury Division; Det. Estes - Domestic Violence Unit; Laney Heard - ADA, Traffic Division.
- July 14th, 2022: Sergeant Michael Fisher presented 15 cases; Det. Grubbs and Det. Martin - Youth Services; Leanna Dugan - Our Kids.
- July 20th, 2022: Sergeant Mike Hotz - MNPB Drug Overdose Unit; Steve Jones - M.N.P.D. Crime Scene Investigations
- July 21st, 2022: Sheriff Daron Hall - D.C.S.O.; Martesha L. Johnson - Chief Public Defender.
- July 27th, 2022: Judge Jennifer Smith - Criminal Court Division IV, DC4.
- August 4th, 2022: Glen Funk - District Attorney

### Grand Jury Case Presenters

Det. Nate Ellsworth presented many cases to the Grand Jury on behalf of the MNPB; Leanna Dugan-Our Kids; Detectives. J. Grubbs and Phillip Klorer; Det. Eisenbaum-Goodlettsville PD; Det. Mariah Iles-Homicide; Det. Timothy Skopek-Homicide; Det. R. Carrigan-Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force; Retired Captain William Dyer, R. Longden, and J. Topper-Internal Investigations for the Sheriff's Office; Det. Looper-TITAN, Gun Violence Unit; Det. Brian Wolters-Airport Police; Det. William Thorowgood-Fraud Unit; Det. C. Martin-Sex Crimes Against Children; Det. E. Cunningham-Arson, Assault, & Attempted Murder; Det. Lober; Det. Russo-Berry Hill Police; H. Harveston-Veteran's Affairs; Det. M. Malone-MPD, Violent Crimes Unit; Det. Seth England-MPD, Human Trafficking Division; Det. Michael Adkins-MPD, Internet Crimes Against Children; Det. Madison Meiss-MPD, Homicide; R. Burghardt-TBI; Det. Chrissie Prill-Vehicular Homicide; Det. Zullo-Child Sex Crimes Unit; Det. Rodney Harbin-Homicide; Det. Eric Reed-Homicide; Special Agent Lisa McCallum-Law Enforcement Branch of Prisons, CERT Team;

Det. Justin Fox-Interdiction Investigation; Det. Mathis-Homicide; Det. Hunter-Goodlettsville PD; Det. Studer-Homicide; Officer Longdon-Sex Offender Communication with Victim; Det. Brian Allen-Fatal Crash Investigation; Det. Flores-Illegal Immigrant Crime; Det. Seth Hodges-Goodlettsville PD; Det. Spillers-Attempted Murder; Det. Baltimore-Homicide; Brian Hellwig-Theft Case; Officer Russell Ward-Vehicular Homicide; Det. Schroeder; Det. John Jackson-Fraud Unit; Officer Christopher Augustin-Fatal Crash Investigations; Det. Dave Lang-Violent Crimes Division; Det. Amber Martin-Theft; Det. C. Beery-Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit; Sgt. Robert Gooddale-Assault on an Officer; Det. B. Byrnes-MPD, Human Trafficking; Det. Jimmy Gregg & Det. A. Graves-MNFD, Fire Investigations Unit; Det. Arthur Hipp-MPD, Homicide Unit; Mary Laplante-Theft; Det. Phillip Box-Homicide Unit; Det. Payne-Child Sex Crimes; Det. Charles Duke-Homicide Unit; Det. Jeff Hunter-Drug Task Force; Det. A. Thompson-Homicide Division; Det. William Durham-Homicide Division; Det. Matthew Herod-Child Abuse, Endangerment, Aggravated Assault; Det. Don Davidson-Vehicular Homicide; Det. Seth Vaughn-Hermitage Precinct, Vehicle Break-ins; Det. B. Quigley-Burglary, Theft; Det. Ryan Russell-Homicide Unit; Sgt. Josh Lefler-Violent Crimes Division; Det. Kim Rothwell-Special Victims Unit; Det. Travis Davidson-Domestic Violence Unit

### **Bright Spot at the Behavioral Care Center**

The Behavioral Care Center (BCC) is a bright spot in Davidson County's battle against crime. As Sheriff Daron Hall says, "The police arrest the person; the goal of the Sheriff's Office is to arrest the crime." Sheriff Hall's goal is to figure out the patterns that result in criminality and address those issues directly. He tells the Grand Jury that 99% of people in custody are addicted to substances. Addressing the substance abuse needs of offenders in Davidson County is showing tremendous promise. The recidivism rate of offenders going through the BCC is 7% versus 80% for the jail.

The Davidson County Sheriff's Office (DCSO) Behavioral Care Center (BCC) is a state licensed, adult supportive, treatment facility providing trauma-informed care to residents in a short-term residential setting as an alternative to jail. Residents who successfully complete the program will not face criminal charges and will be provided resources for continuation of care.

The BCC is a 60-bed facility that can house 30 males and 30 females. At maximum capacity, it is estimated that the facility will impact 1,500-2,000 individuals annually. DCSO's facility is designed to be a treatment setting rather than a correctional one, so the clothing of the staff and authority figures reflects that.

Sheriff Daron Hall and the DCSO work in collaboration with the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department, the District Attorney's Office, and the Metropolitan Public Defender's Office towards the goal of decriminalizing mental illness. These agencies, along with Wellpath and

Mental Health Cooperative providers implement needs assessments and guidelines to determine which arrestees qualify for treatment at the BCC.

Criteria for the BCC includes:

- Mental health or substance use disorder diagnosis
- Misdemeanor charge level
- Acuity level low enough to actively participate in programming

Qualifying individuals are diverted to the BCC rather than a jail facility to begin the process of decriminalizing their arrest. Each resident receives an individualized treatment plan upon arrival at the BCC. Therapists use assessment tools to determine both the targeted areas of focus during their treatment and their anticipated length of stay.

Treatment at the BCC includes individual and group therapy, medication management, peer support, and discharge planning. After stabilization at the BCC, the discharge specialist's goal is to connect each resident with community resources and ensure continuity of care after their release from the BCC facility. Residents receive follow-up calls after discharge to confirm that their plan is still working and to provide additional services as needed.

The Behavioral Care Center is having a positive impact on Davidson County by addressing the root cause of many crimes throughout our area. The Grand Jury supports the continuation and expansion of the Behavioral Care Center for the sake of the residents of Davidson County as well as the offenders helped throughout this effective treatment approach. We thank those involved in the creation and effective implementation of this successful program.

### **A Call to Action for the Citizens of Davidson County**

Tennessee earned its nickname as the volunteer state because of its citizens eagerness to volunteer in times of war. At this time in our nation's history, we are at war with epidemics of fatherlessness, poverty, crime, and fentanyl, to name a few. To stop these epidemics, Davidson County residents must be willing to increase engagement within our local communities. Guiding children into healthy lifestyles and decision-making is imperative for the safety of all Davidson County residents, especially the at-risk children themselves. Feeding the homeless for a couple of hours on Thanksgiving may make us feel good about ourselves, but at-risk youth in our community need more from us to really make a lasting difference in their lives. They need a consistent commitment from us in the form of long-term mentoring or foster parenting.

The citizens of Davidson County can offer to serve as long-term mentors to at-risk youth in our communities. It only takes one, responsible, stable adult to positively influence the course of a child's life. However, we cannot abandon them. Too many children have mentors for a few days or weeks, only never to hear from them again. And so they are abandoned yet again. We must do better. At-risk youth need stable role models to teach them how to secure a healthy, stable, and productive future for themselves as well as to provide support, guidance, and encouragement to them. Having just one person in their lives, whom they do not want to disappoint, can make the difference in a child choosing a life of poverty, addiction, and crime or choosing a life of prosperity, health, and peace. That drive to make one person proud is everything.

Becoming a foster parent is another excellent way to serve children in our community. Foster parents and families are in short supply in Davidson County. Foster parents can have a positive impact on children, who have experienced some truly heartbreaking life events. We should enable some flexibility in the TN-KEY certification process so that more people can become foster parents. Make-up days should be provided to those taking foster care classes. Providing such flexibility will help foster parents-in-training fulfill the requirements necessary to become foster parents, without having to start the entire process over from scratch if they have to miss one class. The Grand Jury saw many cases involving neglect or the physical and sexual abuse of children. If children cannot be rehomed with family, DCS must find a suitable foster home for them. Suitable foster homes are in short supply in Davidson County. Providing stability for children is a truly noble calling. The Grand Jury honors anyone willing to serve the most fragile members of their community in such a selfless way.

#### **Insight and Suggestion from a Formerly-Homeless Nashvillian, "J"**

"J" is an adult Nashvillian, who experienced homelessness, abuse, family separation as a child, and years in a loving, but unsuitable foster care home. Her mother was in jail for the first few years of her life. She has witnessed fatal shootings/gang violence, experienced racism directly, and has struggled to find enough food and clothing. J had to help raise her severely autistic siblings, who were eventually taken away from her after parental abuse of one of her siblings. Her outside play time as a child consisted of sitting on the doorstep outside her apartment door in the breezeway for hours because her mom told her it was too dangerous to play on the playground. And it probably was. She has also experienced the loss of family to a fentanyl overdose and has learned to cope with that tragedy. But her story is not one of complete tragedy.

J still loves her mom, in spite of everything. She hopes and prays for the best when it comes to her mom, but she has learned to keep her expectations low. That way she is not disappointed if her mom makes bad decisions. She has also learned the importance of working hard and saving

money. J is learning to drive, volunteers in a local park, and helped plant a butterfly garden. This winter, she is going to learn how to prune Japanese Maple trees correctly, so that she can earn extra income. J loves taking care of elderly people; she thinks they are so cute. She wants to hold them in her lap, like the son does his aging mother at the end of the beloved children's book, *I'll Love You Forever*. Given her history, that makes perfect sense to me. She has learned the value of asking for help when she needs it, and she finally has a safe place to live for the first time since she was 5 years old. J even has a playful kitten that finally trusts her enough to snuggle with her when she stops bouncing off the walls...the cat, not J.

J is living in safety away from a high-crime area and is working toward the specific goal of never being poor again. J is an incredibly hard worker, who is highly-valued and respected at work. Even though she is not on the Grand Jury, her life-experience is an important one to consider given the fact that she represents many of the victims whose cases we heard this term. She is an incredibly resilient person with a joy for life that is truly exceptional. Her opinion and insights on homelessness, poverty, crime, and the education system scream silently throughout this Grand Jury report because victim's voices like hers matter greatly. The Grand Jury speaks for victims like J.

J's suggestion for the Grand Jury is to consider the formation of community centers in nicer parts of town, so that children in struggling communities can meet people living in better circumstances. The way she phrased it was, "Kids like me need people like you to teach us another way to live. When everyone around us is stuck, we need help getting unstuck." I don't mean to disparage people in lower income parts of Nashville. Most are wonderful, stable people; they are just living in low-income neighborhoods. Most are not criminals, but it doesn't take many criminals to ruin a neighborhood ...or school for that matter.

Offering community connections in safer parts of Davidson County will provide opportunities, mentorships, and alternative pathways forward that will help at-risk youth persevere and thrive. Community centers like the Easley Center at Rose Park (recreation center) already exist, but they exist in more dangerous parts of town, like Edgehill, where many people do not feel safe volunteering. J speaks from first-hand experience when she says, "It's a great place to go after school, but they cannot provide much homework help or mentorship opportunities."

J's suggestion to have community centers in nicer parts of town would elicit participation from volunteers with more secure, stable lives. Many are retired educators, business people, and community leaders, who have lots of free time to volunteer. School bus transportation and food would need to be provided to encourage participation on the part of the children, since some kids do not eat well at home. Bus transportation from schools to the community center and from the community center to their home would need to be provided. J's suggestion would not work unless children can get home when the center closes; J suggests a closing time of 5:30pm. Of course, communication with parents is essential, so parents know where their children are. Volunteers would be fingerprinted and have a background check before volunteering to work with children.

These community centers in wealthier neighborhoods would need to have a clear objective and enforce it. J's suggestion is that their objectives be to teach children how to be successful in school and in life. She says children should have snacks first, tutoring second, and play time or chat sessions last. At least two tutors would need to be available to help out any children needing help with homework, and study areas would need to be separate from play areas to minimize distractions. J says the most important factor, other than safety, is to make sure the children know that volunteers are available to talk if they need them. Once they learn to trust the volunteers, the children will open up to the volunteers.

Existing community centers like the YMCA might be the perfect place to offer such a program in conjunction with MNPS and MPD. Local businesses could encourage volunteerism, mentoring, and job shadowing. J wanted to stress that kids like her grew up in areas where everyone around her was stuck in a cycle of poverty. Kids like her need mentors from better parts of town and better circumstances to help them learn other ways of living their lives. How do they manage to save money? What choices are they making that differ from people in poor communities?

### **Final Thoughts and Thanks**

Judges Mark Fishburn and Cynthia Chappell walked into the jury room on June 21st, 2022 to announce that they would be calling the next Grand Jury. Every single one of the Regular and Alternate Grand Jurors all volunteered to serve. Not one of us had to be "volen-told" to serve on the Grand Jury. Judge Fishburn explained that he would be retiring and that Judge Cynthia Chappell would be taking over for him. Judge Fishburn warned us that we would hear hundreds of heartbreaking cases involving all kinds of crimes, such as including domestic violence, homicides, child abuse, sexual assault, kidnapping, arson, burglaries, robberies, theft, animal abuse, drug-related cases, and more. He also noted that we would most likely find it to be one of the most rewarding experiences of our lives; he was 100% correct.

The Grand Jurors turned a heavy burden into a bonding experience with lots of laughter, levity, and sweet treats. We come from different life experiences and all walks of life, but we got along great and really enjoyed each other's company. I'm not sure if a "Dumbest Criminals Wall of Fame" exists yet, but this Grand Jury certainly nominated a few good ones. My personal favorite was involved the theft of an AC unit by two drunk offenders of a mature age (over 60). The offenders hooked up the AC unit to the back of their vehicle and dragged it to one of their homes. Imagine the sound that must have made. Imagine the gouge marks left in the pavement. The police officers followed the tracks from the crime scene to the defendants' home, where they found them drinking on the front porch. The police officers gathered their driver's licenses. Just then, one of the geniuses decides it's time to make a break for it. He runs

toward his car as one officer looks at him and says, "You know I'm holding your license, right? I know who you are and where you live. Where do you think you're going?" Brilliant. True bill.

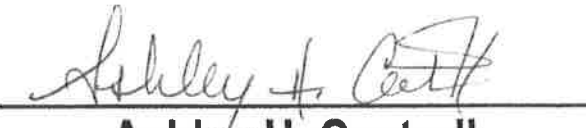
The Grand Jury would like to thank Foreman Parker Toler for his guidance, humor, and leadership. We were happy to help him celebrate his 81st birthday with homemade goodies and a lovely birthday sash that read, "Mr. Toler Happy 81st frfr." For real, for real (frfr) was our little inside joke. We enjoyed your company and appreciate your lifetime of service to Davidson County.

We would also like to thank Sgt. Mike Fisher for his speed, efficiency, thoroughness, and sense of humor when appropriate. We spent the most time with Sgt Fisher, who presented the majority of the cases that came before us on behalf of the MNPD. We wish you well on your future retirement and hope you enjoy your otters and your artwork. Thank you, Sgt. Fisher, for your years of service to your community as a fireman, lawyer, and your interesting career in MNPD. If you get bored, you could serve on a future Grand Jury. We would pay to see that.

Thank you to the many, excellent detectives, investigators, sergeants, special agents, and officers who presented cases to the Grand Jury. You are the unsung heroes of our community, and we cannot convey the depths of our gratitude to you for your part in bringing some of Davidson County's worst criminals to justice. We are so happy to know that people like you are willing to serve your community, and encourage each of you to seek help when the stresses of your job test your coping skills. Thank you!

**Grand Jury July 2022 Term  
Grand Jury Panel  
Regular Members**

  
**Phyllis Y. Brown**

  
**Ashley H. Cantrell**

  
**Carol A. Dillow-Totten**


  
**La'Christle M. Greer**

  
**Carrie S. Hartman**

  
**Benita F. Hassell**

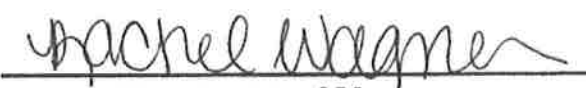
  
**Chanelle R. Matthews**

  
**Albert R. Morton**

  
**Brittany L. Pharr**

  
**Kiran Rangaraj**

  
**Selekia M. Shaw**


  
**Rachel L. Wagner**



**Grand Jury July 2022 Term  
Grand Jury Panel  
Alternate Members**

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**Kathryn R. Collingwood**



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**Sonya Edwards**

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**Irucka A. Embry**

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**Derrick D.G. Guinn**



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**Ashton V. Hunt**

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**Paul D. Lux**



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**Margaret L. Sanguinetti**

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**Patrick J. Simpson**

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**James L. Stromeier**

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**John M. Tierney**

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**Tameka C. Walker**



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**Ashley N. Westby**

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**Annabel G. Yates**