

# Prosecutor asks judges to install 2 grand juries

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

The Oakland County Prosecutor has asked the circuit court judges to approve two grand juries to simultaneously probe drug-related crime and unsolved murders.

Calling the grand jury "devastatingly effective," Prosecutor Richard Thompson Wednesday filed petitions asking judges to extend the existing grand jury until it can conclude ongoing investigations and to empanel a new one for six months.

The petition for a new grand jury must be approved by a majority of Oakland's 14 circuit judges, while the extension of the existing panel will be reviewed by its supervising judge, Robert C. Anderson.

The judges are expected to act on the requests within the next week or two. Thompson said at a press conference Wednesday.

The prosecutor said the second grand jury could be empaneled as early as next month, if judges agree with his petition and act swiftly as they did last summer when he proposed the grand jury probe.

To support the need for a grand jury, Thompson cited the record it has compiled since being empaneled Sept. 6.

NONE OF THOSE indicted have been convicted. Many have, however, been bound over to circuit court, he said.

The grand jury has indicted over 30 individuals, including four for murder, Thompson said.

also indicted key figures in "two major drug rings which had been operating with impunity in Oakland County for several years."

"Twenty-two of those indicted face mandatory life in prison," Thompson said. "These indictments have also led to forfeiture of assets of over \$1.5 million."

Two people have been cited for perjury because of their testimony before the grand jury, he said.

The key to the success of the grand jury has been the tremendous cooperation from county police agencies, Thompson said. And as those police agencies see that going to the grand jury is effective, they are referring more cases to it.

The grand jury has 17 members who Thompson said are facing "burn out" from overwork.

"Initially they met one day every two weeks," Thompson said. "Now they meet three times every two weeks, sometimes from 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m."

He said they had taken testimony from more than 140 witnesses, with others expected to be called for ongoing investigations.

THOMPSON COMMENDED members of the grand jury, saying some had made tremendous personal or business sacrifices. Some are self-employed while others work for companies and are expected to take off work.

Each juror is paid \$15 per day. "We cannot in good conscience ask them to continue this level of activity," Thompson said. "That is why we have asked for a second grand jury."

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Prosecutors within the Oakland County Grand Jury have an additional set of rules under which to operate to guard against abuses, according to the prosecutor who initiated the probe almost six months ago.

"Those rules are designed to guarantee constitutional rights and avoid abuses," Richard Thompson said Tuesday during a meeting of the Birmingham Republican Women's Club at the Kingsley Inn.

Thompson's address was one day before the prosecutor called a press conference to announce if he would allow the grand jury to dissolve, seek a six-month extension or call for a new grand jury.

The grand jury first met Sept. 6 at the request of the prosecutor to investigate the "illegal drug delivery network" and unsolved murders. Since then, the grand jury has returned 30 indictments, including four for murder.

Two witnesses have been charged with perjury for testimony given before the grand jury, Thompson said.

This is the first citizens grand jury in Oakland County in 17 years.

Thompson called the grand jury a "devastating investigatory weapon" against drug trafficking.

THE PROSECUTOR said he was particularly encouraged by indictments handed down involving two narcotics operations — one involving

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How's this for a complimentary introduction?

When introducing Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson program chairperson Chris Burd Tuesday told the Birmingham Republican Women's Club the usual information.

Thompson attended the University of Michigan, graduated from the

Wayne State University Law School and served as chief assistant prosecutor to L. Brooks Patterson for 16 years before being elected prosecutor in 1988.

Then Burd added a flattering note: "He (Thompson) was my husband's attorney during our divorce. If I like him, he must be a really good person."

going to jail for contempt, Thompson said.

Thompson said the concept of the grand jury has deep roots in English law, dating back to about the year 1166.

But history also demonstrated a concern that calling a grand jury bestowed too much power to the prosecutor, Thompson acknowledged.

That's why Oakland circuit judges — who OK'd the grand jury and must also approve any extension — were initially cautious, Thompson said.

"I, too, was aware of the potential for abuse," he said. "And I knew if I tolerated any abuse, the judges would take away this tool."

SOME TYPICAL abuses of the grand jury, Thompson said, are a prosecutor browbeating a witness, or exerting undue influence on the grand jury, just to run the numbers of indictments up.

To guard against abuses, Thompson said he drafted 20 guidelines calling for assistant prosecutors to conduct themselves with "self-restraint, a sense of fairness and the highest professionalism" and refrain from inflammatory statements or arguments that would influence the grand jury's action.

He noted that assistant prosecutors who present cases to the grand jury must subsequently handle the case in court.

"That's like making somebody pack their own parachute," he said. "If an assistant prosecutor knows he (or she) must handle the case, he or she is more likely to make sure constitutional rights are guaranteed and the case is founded on sound law."

Thompson urged members of the audience (about 35) to discuss the benefits of the grand jury with their friends and neighbors and to support it whenever possible.

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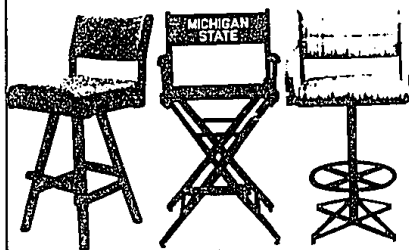
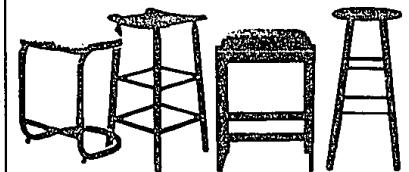
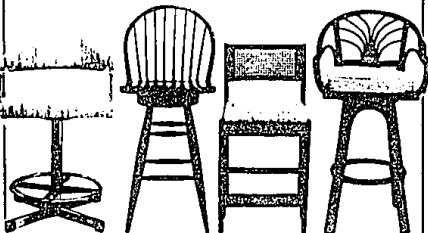
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