

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2010 GRAND JURY REPORT

The experience serving on the Grand Jury during September and October 2010 has been revealing and worthwhile for all of us. While there have been some eye-opening moments during the service, there were also some moments where the dedication of our law enforcement and legal services displayed the true character of American justice. Though we sometimes live in a safe cocoon and are unaware of much of the criminal element of our community, it has been rewarding to know that we have such concerned professionals seeking to keep that community safe and silently nestled inside that cocoon. Having said that, there are some avenues of concern we, the Grand Jury, feel need to be addressed or built upon for continued future success.

First, the service provided by the Commonwealth's Attorney Lynn Pryor has been outstanding. She, along with her staff, took the time to carefully and thoroughly explain the charges to be considered for indictments; Whitney Westerfield, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney, was particularly insightful and professional during the course of the day he spent with the Grand Jury. Because of this dedication and service to the legal system, the Grand Jury feels that the Commonwealth's Attorney should be given a secure and permanent parking place instead of being subjected to possible dangerous situations she may find herself involved in. In order to get the "job" done, we feel our Commonwealth's Attorney should be freed up from as many obstacles as possible. This parking situation, we feel, can definitely be considered a possible obstacle.

Another issue that the Grand Jury feels strongly about is the amount of drug offenses, many of which are multiple repeat offenders. While our justice system may not be perfect, there has to be more action taken against those who are trafficking the drugs and those who never seem to "get the message". The Grand Jury spent a majority of the time considering the

indictments of those charged with felonies centering around the abuses of controlled substances. We feel that stiffer punishments and more jail and prison time is required for those who continue to be involved in this criminal lifestyle. We understand that our prison systems are strained and are underfunded, understaffed, and overwhelmed, but this should not affect the sentencing given to those who have had their “chance” and chose to continue offending. This repeat offender issue is not only centered on those convicted of drug-related felonies, but it should also include those who continue to engage in unlawful activity after being released from their prior sentences.

Another major issue the Grand Jury feels should be addressed is the up-and-coming certainty of more gang presence in the community. After watching the gang presentation during service, we were a little taken aback about the lack of funding and attention paid to gang presence and gang related violence in the county. One deputy from the Sheriff’s Office can’t be tasked alone with such a responsibility. Law makers should open their eyes to the threat that has risen inside Christian County and become more responsible about the realities of violent and drug-related crimes these gangs are responsible for. It’s a future that is made present, and politics should not be placed in front of public safety.

Finally, the Grand Jury believes that \$12.50 per day is far too little for such an important job as the one we are tasked with. Although we are honored to provide service to our community, our Commonwealth, and our nation, many have had to rearrange their lives drastically in order to perform this duty. As citizens who follow the rules and proudly serve on juries, we ask that thought be given to that very important fact.

Although we have expressed our concerns, it is more important to note the appreciation we feel for those who serve to protect and put their lives on the line for us daily. We want to make sure that their sacrifices are not forgotten and we will take away a newly found

appreciation for services we often take for granted. Every case presented to us was done with great forethought and a desire to stamp out the criminal element. Each law enforcement member came to the Grand Jury with a case based on excellent evidence and explained those facts with great professionalism. That, too, was shown in the knowledge displayed by the Commonwealth's Attorney. Within the matter of weeks, the Grand Jury became much more educated about our nation's legal system and the fight behind the scenes to keep every citizen safe.

The experience serving on the Grand Jury was an individual and collective honor. We will take pride in the service with us as we leave the table and return to our everyday lives. Though we may take that away, we leave our prayers and hopes for the future. Prayers to those involved with making the tough decisions and hope for the next jury to find the experience as rewarding as we have found it.

Foreperson

October 29, 2010