

2009 MAY 15 AM 9:24

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF RICHMOND COUNTY  
EVANINE C. JOHNSON, CLERK  
RICHMOND COUNTY, GA.

STATE OF GEORGIA

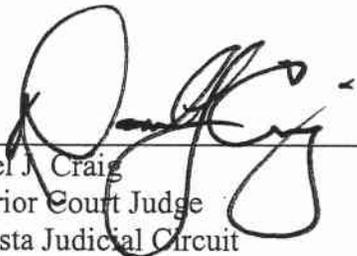
IN RE: GRAND JURY PRESENTMENT FOR THE MARCH TERM 2009

The Grand Jury having returned the attached general presentment for the March Term 2009, and the same having been reviewed and accepted by the Court on May 15, 2009, it is now,

ORDERED that the said presentment shall be filed in the Office of the Clerk of Superior Court for Richmond County, and that it shall be published once in the *Augusta Chronicle*, the legal gazette for said County; and

FURTHER ORDERED that the said general presentment shall be posted by the Director of Information Technology on the Augusta-Richmond County website for public access through the Internet (World Wide Web).

It is so ORDERED this 15th day of May 2009.

  
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Daniel J. Craig  
Superior Court Judge  
Augusta Judicial Circuit

TO: The Honorable Daniel J. Craig  
Judge, Superior Court

FROM: Richmond County Grand Jury  
March Term 2009

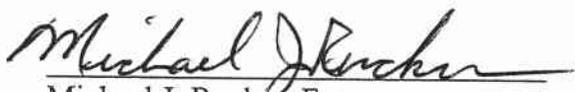
DATE: May 15, 2009

RE: Grand Jury Presentment

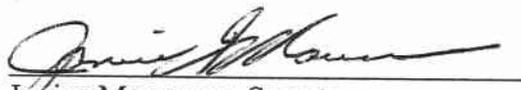
We, the members of the Augusta-Richmond County Grand Jury for the March Term 2009, having been duly sworn by the Honorable Daniel J. Craig on the 16th day of March 2009, submit our presentment on the 15th day of May 2009, our last day as an official body of the Grand Jury.

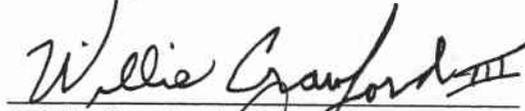
To discharge our sworn functions, as prescribed by the laws of the State of Georgia, we met on eight (8) dates during our term and acted upon Bills of Indictment presented to us by the District Attorney's Office. Sub-Committees were formed to inspect the Augusta-Richmond County Law Enforcement Center, the District Attorney's Office and the Richmond County Board of Education; applicable reports are attached.

Respectfully, we submit this presentment on the 15th day of May 2009 and request that it be published.

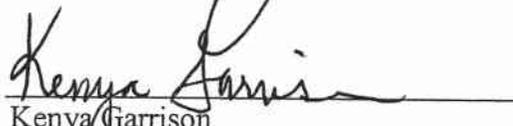
  
Michael J. Rucker, Foreperson

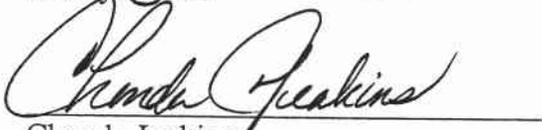
  
Edward S. Chavis, Asst. Foreperson

  
Janice Mousseau, Secretary

  
Willie Crawford, III

  
Kenny Echols

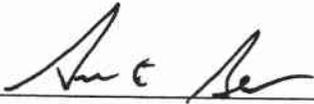
  
Kenya Garrison

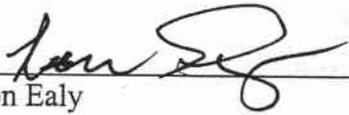
  
Chonda Jenkins

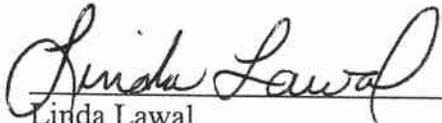
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Randall Key

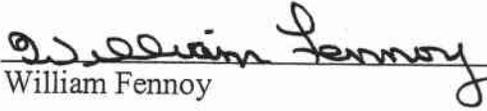
  
April N. Cofer

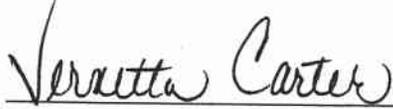
  
Chequita Stephens

  
Susan E. Beck

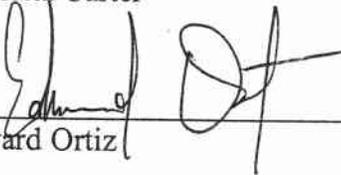
  
Ron Ealy

  
Linda Lawal

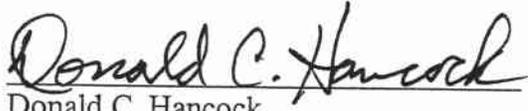
  
William Fennoy

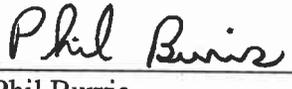
  
Vernetta Carter

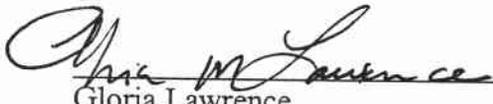
  
Russell Reams

  
Edward Ortiz

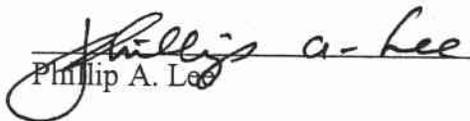
  
Lillie Mangrum

  
Donald C. Hancock

  
Phil Burris

  
Gloria Lawrence

  
Shalanda Morris

  
Phillip A. Lee

SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MARCH TERM 2009 GRAND JURY  
REPORT ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION – TRANSPORTATION AND  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICES

On May 6, 2009, the Sub-Committee of the March Term 2009 Grand Jury met first with Dr. Dana Bedden, Superintendent of Richmond County Schools; Mr. Pete Fletcher, Board Attorney; Mr. Shinn, Director of Transportation; Mr. Wiley, Assistant Director of Transportation; Mr. Thompson, Special Programs; and Mr. Spires, Comptroller. At the conclusion of this meeting, we then met with Dr. Bedden, Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Spires along with Mr. Dave Voss and Mr. Louis Svehla, of Voss & Associates, regarding the Public Information Office.

The Transportation Office has a daunting task each day of ensuring that over 22,000 students are picked up and delivered to their respective schools and returned home safely in the afternoon. On any given day, they average about 26 drivers absent with only a standby driver list of 16. Mr. Shinn and Mr. Fletcher explained that policy governing the transporting of students is established by the members of the Board of Education; however, administrative procedures are established by Mr. Shinn's office.

People applying to become a bus driver must meet certain qualifications with the best qualified being hired. Newly hired bus drivers are given training which includes reviewing a manual on policies and procedures. Mr. Shinn and Dr. Bedden acknowledged there are, at times, delays in a bus picking up students for school and/or school events. The goal is to minimize this from occurring. A computerized bus system is now in place which allows for personnel to know at all times where all buses are as well as the speed they are traveling. Selecting bus drivers for special events is handled on a seniority basis.

Bus routes are reviewed annually and are adjusted according to the population of a particular area/school. The population in Richmond County over the last few years has seen a decrease. A Transportation Council has been established to assist in a variety of ways.

Dr. Bedden explained that a MGT Report along with other outside agencies concluded there was a significant void in not having a Director of Public Information. With over 5,000 employees of the Richmond County School System/Board of Education, an office should be established to provide a more effective mechanism of assimilating and disseminating information both to employees as well as the public. As a result of this report, bids were submitted and a contract awarded to Voss & Associates. Although Mr. Louis Svehla is the only on-site person, he has the support of personnel at Voss & Associates' main office in Sarasota, Florida.

The primary purpose of the Public Information Office is to communicate to the public various aspects of the education of the children in Richmond County Schools. This is being accomplished through establishing a relationship with the parents, teachers and

media. Mr. Svehla explained his efforts to get involved in community events that affect children. He expressed the utmost support from Dr. Bedden saying that Dr. Bedden is the real catalyst in allowing him to be open and transparent in disseminating information. Mr. Svehla is constantly looking for creative ways to improve communication with the public such as building partner networks and looking for sponsors. They have installed a computer system called Global Connect that enables messages to be sent to all parents and/or teachers automatically. It also enables personnel to send a message to a parent informing them that their child is absent from school which also becomes an official record. This has proven to be very effective in communicating to the parents.

Dr. Bedden told us of a free newspaper magazine "U - Urban Living in Augusta" published by Augusta Metro Spirit in which he [Dr. Bedden] contributes articles concerning the Board of Education and the Richmond County School System. He sees this as an opportunity to reach out to the public.

Mr. Fletcher was asked to explain the status of Richmond County Schools continuing to be under a desegregation order. He explained the process to us and the attorney/legal cost associated with the federal requirement.

Sub-Committee Members:

Shalanda Morris  
Chequita Stephens  
Lillie Mangrum  
Ed Ortiz  
Linda Lawal  
Gloria Lawrence  
Kenny Echols  
Janice Mousseau

May 13, 2009

On Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, at 12:15 pm, the Grand Jury reported to the Richmond County Jail, which is known as, "401", because of its location at 401 Walton Way . We were greeted by Captain Reeves, captain of the facility. We were joined by Major Johnson in a conference room and allowed to ask any questions we had about the facility. Here, we learned that Major Johnson was responsible for both facilities.

We were told the Charles B. Webster Detention Center, known as "Phinzy Road", also because of its location housed non-violent detainees, while the jail served as both a holding facility and detention center for violent detainees.

Next, we were served a delicious lunch, which was prepared by trustees. We learned that several of them had years of cooking and baking experience. Three meals a day are available at the dining facility, which is apparently open to all employees, free of charge. The trustees were very hospitable. One of the trustees said he and the other trustees wake up much earlier than the other detainees and live in a separate dorm. He said they enjoy better meals and portion sizes, obviously because of their proximity of the food and possibly have more privilege. Trustees are tested for communicable diseases and cannot be found guilty of any violent crimes.

The same trustee told me that Captain Reeves is a very kind person. He said that when inmates have problems or concerns, they write letters to Capt. Reeves. He said that each morning, he reads them as he eats breakfast and responds to the needs and concerns quickly. He assured me that he was not paid to say that. I asked about his academic background and training. He said his background was in criminal justice and sociology.

After eating, we saw the dorm, which was located across the hall, then proceeded to booking, where we watched someone take mug shots and have his leg bracelet cut off. We visited the medical facility, which runs 24 hours a day. The staff works in 8 hour shifts, as opposed to the officers, who work in 12 hour shifts (6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. or vice versa). We also learned that about 80% of detainees take some sort of drug to keep them calm. We also learned that there are several pregnant women detainees, two of which are expected to deliver before they are released from the facility.

In the clinic, we were told that detainees in Richmond County will not be forced to pay for their own medical coverage. This is due, in part, to the fact that too many of the detainees are indigents. Some of them are in a cycle of days, weeks or months, in and out of the hospital. It would be impossible to make them pay for the medical care they receive. We also learned that quite a few of the detainees intentionally get arrested in order to get shelter and medical care. The clinic is contracted through Correctional Medical Service and includes psychologist, dentist, doctors, nurses and supporting staff.

Captain Reeves informed us that it costs approximately \$45 per day, per inmate to feed, clothe and take care of personal hygiene of the detainees in Richmond County. Each inmate receives deodorant, soap, toothpaste and a toothbrush.

After leaving that area, we proceeded to the recreation area. Here we watched the inmates play basketball. We were informed that this was the only time the inmates were allowed to not wear a full uniform. While on "the yard", which is a covered area, similar to a balcony, but much bigger and completely enclosed, they could wear only the t-shirt with the pants, or take the shirt completely off. However, boxers were not allowed to be exposed.

The uniforms looked similar to scrubs. Green uniforms were worn by inmates from one area, orange was worn by inmates from the other. East and West area inmates never meet. Some are separated intentionally, to keep opposing gangs from clashing, or a variety of other reasons. They all, however, wore shoes that looked like shower shoes. Inmates enjoy an hour and a half of free time per day. At this time, they can sit in a general population area and watch television, walk around the general area, or go outside on "the yard" to play basketball or just stand in the sunlight.

The rest of the time is spent in their cells. We noticed the contrast of their situation from the trustees, in that trustees have much more freedom. Their dorm has quite a few beds. However, the area is open, similar to the recreation area of the other inmates.

Everyone is happy about the recent changes to cable! Since television was changed to digital, more channels are available. However, some channels are still blocked. The music channels, HBO and other premium channels are not available.

Next, we listened in on the inmates who were in a separate small area, or disciplinary lockdown. Some were housed because of an apparent fight. There was also an incident that day, where an inmate broke into the snack machine and began stealing snacks.

The average inmate stays at the detention center for approximately six to nine months. The oldest inmate was in his nineties. The youngest ever was 14. The youngest now is about 17. He is housed with his brother.

After leaving this area, we went into another office. We spoke to Chief Hatfield. He gave us some history and a general rundown of operations. He was very friendly and knowledgeable. He offered to let any of us ride in one of the patrol cars if at anytime, while on the Grand Jury, we wanted more of an in depth experience of what occurs on a day to day basis in law enforcement in the area. After a few more minutes of discussion about budget, we shook hands with Captain Reeves and Sergeant Hartfield and exited the building.

SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MARCH TERM 2009 GRAND JURY  
REPORT ON THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

The Sub-Committee visited the offices of the District Attorney on Wednesday, May 6, 2009 from 9:00 a.m. until approximately 10:30 a.m. The offices are located on the fourth floor of the Hatcher Building located at 501 Greene Street. Sub-Committee members met in front of the building's lobby and took the elevator to the fourth floor. The elevator opens up into the hallway that leads to the office's receptionist. There is a security camera monitoring the hallway and visitors use an intercom system to talk with the receptionist. The office entrance area seems reasonably secure.

The District Attorney met the group and escorted the members to the main conference room. The District Attorney provided a brief overview of the number of people who work in the offices and their roles. The District Attorney said their office serves a population roughly comparable to the Savannah area and they do so with fewer resources. The District Attorney mentioned some of the cost-cutting methods that are currently being implemented which included holding unfilled positions open for up to ninety days.

The District Attorney then took the group on a tour of the offices. Most of the individual offices are located around the floor perimeter and the administrative assistants are grouped together in larger interior areas. The administrative assistants do not have any type of cubicle walls. The offices were reasonably well lighted and organized. The room temperature seemed comfortable. The building looked reasonably well maintained and only a couple of minor items were observed that appeared to need attention. The Sub-Committee asked about the quality of the computer equipment used by the staff and were told that desktop computers are supplied by Augusta-Richmond County and laptop computers are supplied by the State of Georgia. Computer equipment appeared to be of good quality. The District Attorney noted that the office receives very good IT support for all of the equipment from Augusta-Richmond County. The office staff appeared to have good quality chairs. The air conditioner fan was somewhat noisy but it is located in the hallway.

The staff stores many boxes of records in storage rooms and in the hallways. The boxes are neatly stacked up to five high and labeled. There is an index that is used to identify the records contained in each box. The records are accessible to anyone in the office area. The Sub-Committee noted that the fourth floor has no fire sprinklers in the ceiling. The District Attorney mentioned that the fire alarm system has been checked for proper operation.

The District Attorney spent some time discussing the role of the people who work in the Victim's Assistance Program Office. The people in these roles are not lawyers, but act as liaisons to help victims better understand the legal system. There are currently four of these positions. However, the office could use a fifth person because there are five judges and all of them can be scheduled for court at the same time. The District Attorney also spoke about the need for some type of interactive media equipment to be added to the Grand Jury Room to aid in presenting evidence.

The Grand Jury asked about office cleaning and garbage disposal. There is a part-time County employee who does the office cleaning. The office has paper shredders for disposal of confidential documents as needed.

The Sub-Committee members would like to make the following recommendations based on the tour of the offices of the District Attorney and from their time in the Grand Jury Room:

Consider adding a fifth position to the Victim's Assistance Program Office or consider alternate ways to staff a fifth position using current office staff. Perhaps some type of rotating position could be considered.

Consider adding cubicle walls for the administrative assistants. This would reduce some of the distractions that come from working in a fairly congested area.

Request building maintenance to inspect all electrical receptacles and switch plates for covers. During the office tour, we observed one receptacle box with exposed and disconnected wiring and a switch missing its cover.

Review location and number of fire extinguishers.

Review trash disposal procedure to ensure adequate handling considering that many written documents are easily accessible in the office areas.

The Sub-Committee members would like to thank the District Attorney and her staff for the time they spent with us during the office tour.

The County should provide a permanently installed interactive media system in the Grand Jury Room. This equipment should include items such as a Smart Board and easy-to-use software for working with digital images and videos. A good audio system would also be part of this system. Often times a sketch or picture of the alleged crime scene, in addition to the verbal testimony of the witnesses, would be a very helpful aid to the Grand Jurors in trying to understand the case.

Sub-Committee Members:

Phil Burris  
Kenny Echols  
Linda Lawal  
Gloria Lawrence  
Lillie Mangrum  
Shalanda Morris  
Janice Mousseau