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Grant's atypical murder case gets 'special' treatment

George Hunter / The Detroit News

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WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP -- Most accused criminals stand trial in anonymity. But Stephen Grant is not a typical defendant.

His face has been broadcast across the country. Reporters have interviewed his relatives, childhood friends and even a convenience store clerk who recalled selling him newspapers.

Every word of his confession to police -- how he strangled his wife, Tara, on Feb. 9, then cut her body into 14 pieces -- is available to anyone with Internet access.

Because of that notoriety, Grant is getting a level of legal representation that isn't usually provided to murder defendants with court-appointed attorneys, court records show. He has two attorneys who have sought extra public funds for everything from a jury consultant to a second autopsy of Tara Grant.

Prosecutors argue Grant should be treated like any other defendant, but court officials and some legal experts say extra measures are necessary to ensure he gets a fair trial when it begins Sept. 19.

"From a legal perspective, it may be hard to justify the greater resources being afforded the defendant in this case," University of Detroit Mercy law professor Larry Durbin said. "But from a practical perspective, because this case has received so much public attention, it does somewhat justify giving the accused an opportunity to help level the playing field."

Macomb Prosecutor Eric Smith -- who filed court papers Thursday opposing Grant's lawyers' requests for more resources -- says the case's circumstances shouldn't affect how he's treated.

"What difference does it make if there's a lot of media attention? The presence of the media

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David Guralnick / The Detroit News

Murder suspect Stephen Grant is getting two court-appointed attorneys, a level of legal representation that isn't usually provided defendants, court records show. [See full image](#)

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doesn't change the facts of the case," Smith said.

After Grant was arrested in March, Chief Circuit Judge Antonio Viviano circumvented a list of public defenders and appointed attorney Stephen Rabaut to represent Grant.

Viviano said the decision was unprecedented in recent Macomb County history, but he said in a written statement it was necessary because "the intense attention it has received requires a defense attorney with proven ability to handle potential distractions while providing the best possible counsel."

Viviano later appointed a second attorney, Gail Pamukov, to represent Grant, which was also unusual, Smith said.

"I've never heard of a defendant in Macomb County getting two public defenders," Smith said. "And Viviano's meddling has opened up a Pandora's Box, because now we're starting to get other defendants asking for two court-appointed attorneys."

Last month, Richard Powers, the court-appointed attorney representing accused murderer David Wright, petitioned a judge for a second public defender to help him with the case. Wright is accused of murdering Washington Township resident Marilou Johnson on June 14, then dumping her body in Cass Lake. A decision on Powers' request for a second attorney is expected Aug. 8.

Rabaut and Pamukov pointed out in a court motion filed July 10 there are several attorneys from the prosecutor's office working on the Grant case.

"Smith complains that (Grant) is getting 'special treatment,' " said the motion, which was a request for an initial \$3,800 defense budget. "How is it then that Smith gets to have three attorneys work on this case full time?"

Smith countered that his assistant prosecutors are working on several cases simultaneously. The initial defense budget requested by Grant's attorneys is more money than some court-appointed attorneys in Macomb County get for an entire trial, court records show. For instance, public defender Azhar Sheikh -- who was next on the public defender list when Viviano chose Rabaut and Pamukov to represent Grant -- billed the county for \$2,325 in April to represent Joseph Hendrix, who was charged and convicted of first-degree murder.

Court-appointed attorneys in Macomb County each receive \$500 per day to defend capital crimes such as murder -- "and if Grant's attorneys are already asking for almost \$4,000 before they've even spent a day in court, then that's going to be a massive bill when all this is over," said Ronald Goldstein, a Sterling Heights attorney who has represented several murder defendants as a public defender.

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Elizabeth Conley / The Detroit News
The notoriety surrounding Grant's murder case is widespread. [See full image](#)

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