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Saturday, November 17, 2007

Grant lawyer under scrutiny

Judge investigates whether accused killer's attorney defied gag order with television interview.

George Hunter / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A Macomb County Circuit Court judge is looking into whether the attorney for accused murderer Stephen Grant violated a gag order by giving an interview to a Detroit television station less than two weeks before Grant is to stand trial for killing and dismembering his wife, Tara.

Several people familiar with the case said Circuit Judge Diane Druzinski was upset about the promos for the interview that aired Friday on WXYZ (Channel 7) with the phrase: "Stephen Grant's lawyer tells all."

In the interview, attorney Stephen Rabaut spoke in general terms about a defendant's constitutional right to legal defense. He referred to himself as a "law enforcement officer" who believes the government is required to prove its case against an accused criminal before a judge and jury.

Advertisement

Sterling Heights attorney Charles Langton, who has been following the case, said the interview did not violate the gag order because it didn't address anything specific about the case.

"I think it was a good interview with a high-profile lawyer who is about to handle a high-profile case," he said. "I think Mr. Rabaut answered questions a lot of people have about an attorney defending a person that has admitted to committing some criminal activity."

Macomb County spokesman Phil Frame declined to comment about the interview itself, but said promotional spots earlier in the day prompted discussions about the gag order.

"The judge is aware of this interview and is looking into the matter," Frame said. "Phone calls have been made about

this, and there have been discussions among the principals involved."

Frame said Friday that the interview would not postpone the case, regardless of what was said by Rabaut. The trial is scheduled to start Nov. 27.

University of Detroit Mercy law professor Larry Dubin said Rabaut risked angering the judge by granting the interview so close to the trial's scheduled start date.

"He runs the risk in making public statements so close to the trial date because the judge might be very concerned about compliance with the gag order," Dubin said. "And it's appropriate for a judge to be concerned about trying to get a fair and impartial jury."

The gag order, issued July 31, orders attorneys to refrain from "communicating with the media about any outstanding issues and any information counsel knows or reasonably should know is likely to create a substantial risk of prejudice if disclosed."

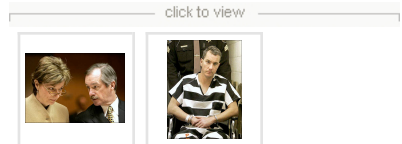
Grant is charged with murdering his wife, Tara, following an argument on Feb. 9.

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Comments by Stephen Rabaut, with fellow attorney Gail Pamukov, have raised questions. (Todd McInturf / The Detroit News)



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