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CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP SEEKS STATE LAW PROTECTING JURORS

“Public attacks and media assassination on jurors threaten the foundation of Florida Jury System”

ORLANDO – The Orlando based Florida Civil Rights Association is seeking a state law that will provide additional protection for prospective, current and former jurors. Recently, a jury in Orlando rendered a verdict finding Casey Anthony not guilty of murdering her 2 year-old daughter stunned the nation and outraged the public.

“Public attacks and media assassination on **Casey Anthony’s jurors** for carrying out their civic duty threaten the foundation of Florida's Justice System,” said, J Willie David, III, President of the Florida Civil Rights Association. Serving on a jury should not result in public intimidation and death threats, David said.

The Sixth Amendment of the Constitution guarantees everyone the right to a trial by a jury of their peers. With crime steadily rising, the responsibility of jurors is more important now than ever, David added.

"U.S. citizens enjoy personal freedoms and legal rights many people in other countries only dream of," said David. "Our court system is the cornerstone of democracy and the survival depends on the trust and confidence of the public. The protection of our rights and liberties is achieved through a strong court system - serving as a juror is a duty and a privilege and a serious and important responsibility," he said.

The jury system was created so that ordinary citizens can render a verdict of **guilty** or **not guilty** against people accused of a crime, David stated. There is something noble when the U.S. Constitution put such *absolute power* in the hands of normal people. Juries can reach unpopular verdicts that could shock an entire nation. This is justice in America, and the people can like it or not, David said.

The United States Supreme Court and Florida Supreme Court have held that freedom of expression never includes **illegal threats of violence** towards a juror, prospective juror, a former juror, or any of their friends and family, David added, Moreover, anyone who demands “speak with” juror members, cannot ignore the potential violence some may commit against a group of people who, through no fault of their own, are chosen and compelled, through threat of jail, to serve on a jury.

The Florida Civil Rights Association states that no one can hide behind the idea of putting jurors under “scrutiny” in an effort to make the juror known to the general public. **Because no amount of public scrutiny can change a not-guilty verdict**, putting jurors under public scrutiny only serves to intimidate, harass, or other wise punish jurors for an unpopular verdict.

The Florida Civil Rights Association also point out that the threat of crimes against jury members demand a priority response because of the special role juries have in the justice system. Crimes and **the threat of violence against a jury and its members may effectively intimidate other prospective jurors, leaving them feeling isolated, vulnerable and unprotected**. The Ultimate result of a failure to protect jurors is harm to the public and truly innocent because of heightened potential of future verdicts being based on fear rather than fact and law.

The Florida Civil Rights Association is asking **State Senator Gary Siplin (D-19 Orlando)** to sponsor legislation that will provide additional protecting for jurors to include a **“reasonable cooling-off period”** before releasing the identities of jurors to the public in felony cases. Moreover, contacting a juror, after the juror has publicly made clear that they do not wish to be contacted, should be a third degree, level 7 felony (increase penalty).

The Florida Civil Rights Association believe these added changes to protect jurors will benefit the Florida judiciary by promoting public confidence in the jury system, improving the administration of justice, and enhancing the efficiency of court operations.

The Florida Civil Rights Association (FCRA) is a non-profit, non-partisan, statewide organization based in Orlando with members and supporters dedicated to protecting and expanding the civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitutions and civil rights laws of the United States and the State of Florida. Learn more about the FCRA by visiting our website: www.fcranews.com

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