



Everything New Orleans

3 indicted in New Orleans bond scheme

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By **John Simerman, The Times-Picayune**

A **state grand jury** has indicted two men and a woman in an illegal bail bond scheme that arose from a joint investigation by the Orleans Parish district attorney's office and federal authorities, a spokesman for District Attorney **Leon Cannizzaro** said.



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A grand jury handed up an indictment Thursday accusing three people in an illegal bond scheme.

The indictment returned Thursday alleges that former licensed bail bondsman Torrey Lewis schemed with murder suspect Stanley Berniard and Christina Sentmore to post an illegal property bond to free Berniard, 32, from jail.

According to Cannizzaro's office, Lewis lied, saying that he was Berniard's cousin, and then lied about the value of properties he used to post Berniard's bond. The properties were loaded up with city liens.

Berniard and Sentmore paid Lewis \$13,000 to post the bond, under which Lewis had sworn that he received nothing of value for

it, according to Cannizzaro's office.

The dual investigation has been ongoing for months, said spokesman Christopher Bowman, an assistant district attorney. He declined to what other charges might emerge from the probe.

It was the first state court indictment stemming from the joint investigation, said Bowman.

U.S. Attorney **Jim Letten** confirmed Friday that the two agencies are working together on bond-related cases in what he called "a good partnership."

Shady bond practices at the criminal district court have drawn increasing scrutiny.

Four years ago, District Court Judge **Charles Elloie** retired while under fire over his practice of reducing bail bonds for suspects in violent felonies. The state Supreme Court had voted to suspend Elloie, after the state Judiciary Commission said his practices created "a substantial threat of harm to the administration of justice and the public as a whole."

Elloie's retirement, ostensibly for poor health, ended a state probe into his bond moves.

More recently, former courthouse clerk **Gilishia Garrison pleaded guilty** in federal court in March to four counts of computer fraud for her role in a kickback scheme related to bonds. Garrison admitted taking money from criminal defendants in exchange for reducing their jail bonds.

Garrison was accused of logging into the computer system maintained by the Sheriff's Office and changing defendants' bail status to show -- falsely -- that recognizance bonds were approved by judges.

As part of her deal, Garrison, who awaits sentencing, has agreed to cooperate with federal investigators. A sentencing hearing that had been set for Thursday was postponed, often a sign that a defendant is providing useful information.

Lewis, Berniard and Sentmore face one count each of receiving illegal consideration for a criminal bail bond, conspiracy to receive illegal consideration, money laundering and conspiracy to launder money.

Berniard, 32, is accused of second-degree murder in the killing of **Alvin Crosby**, who was shot and killed as he sat in a car at **Perdido and South Roman streets** last summer. Police arrested Berniard in February, and his bond was set at \$250,000.

Berniard's record also includes an arrest for aggravated assault on a police officer in 2003. He faces pending charges for illegal carrying of a weapon with a controlled dangerous substance and possession of a firearm in an alcoholic beverage outlet. Cannizzaro's office also charged him this year with discharging a firearm in a violent crime, in a case that was refused in 2005.

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