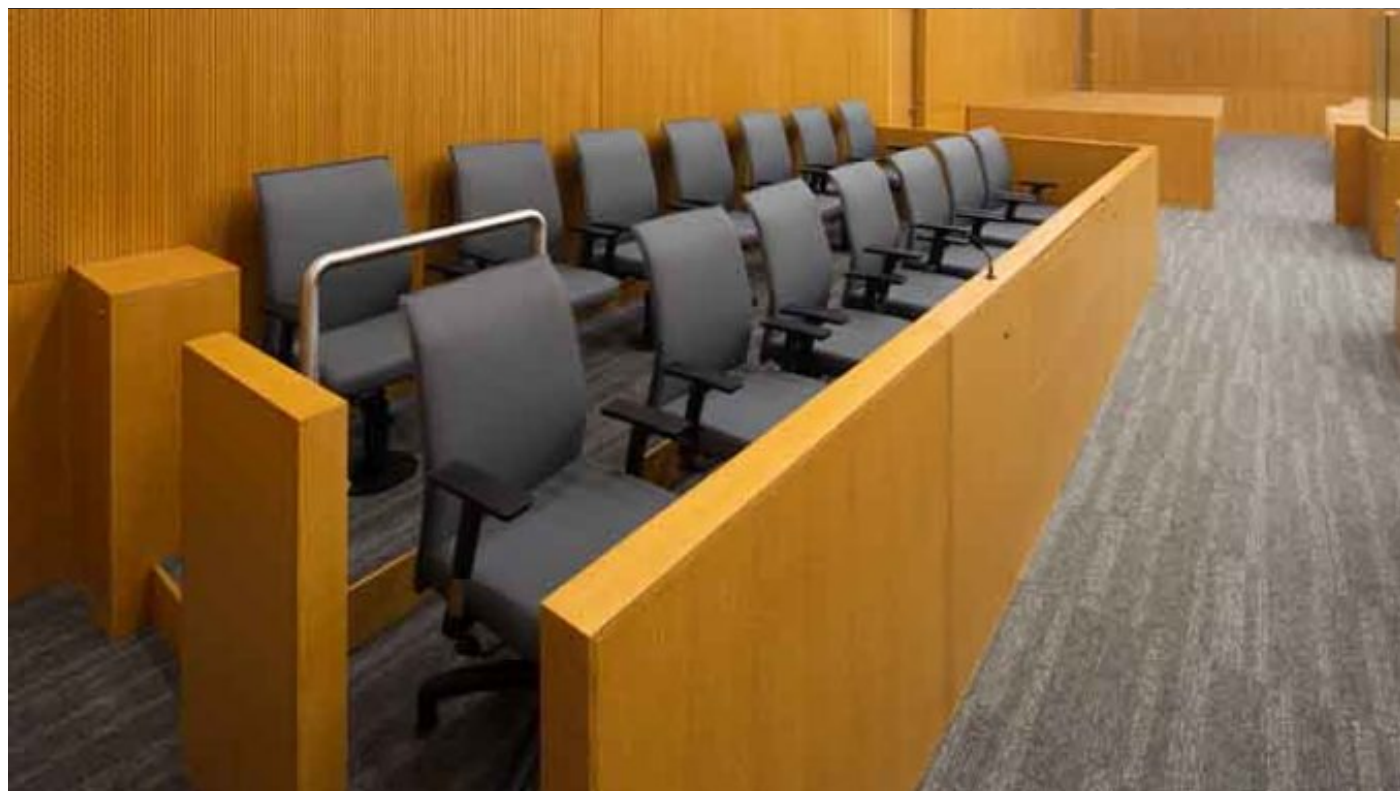


Grand Jury Appears To Be Investigating LDS Church's Handling Of Child Sex Abuse Confession



Arizona Daily Independent has learned that a Cochise County grand jury investigation started earlier this year will cause an indefinite delay in a lawsuit on behalf of three young victims of abuse filed against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The existence of the normally secret grand jury investigation was revealed Monday by Judge Timothy Dickerson, who is Cochise County's presiding judge. He issued an order cancelling a hearing Judge Laura Cardinal was supposed to conduct Wednesday in the lawsuit involving admissions former U.S. Border Patrol agent Paul Douglas Adams made to two LDS lay bishops in 2010 and 2012 that he was sexually abusing his children.



The bishops have acknowledged knowing about the abuse and contacting Church officials in Utah. The Church's defense in the lawsuit is that Arizona law prohibited the confessional statements from being divulged without Paul Adams' consent.

Cardinal planned to use the Dec. 1 hearing to mediate discovery disputes among the various parties involved in the lawsuit. But that hearing, according to Dickerson's Nov. 29 order, will not happen until "a to-be-determined date" after he rules on a motion "pending in Case Number GJ21-0072."

Cochise County court records show GJ21-0072 was opened sometime between Feb. 25 and April 15. Dickerson's order does not indicate who is the subject of the grand jury's attention, but it would appear to be someone other than the dead father.

And the children's mother, Leizza Adams, has already completed a prison sentence after being convicted for her role in the long-running abuse. She relinquished her parental rights to her six children several years ago.

That appears to leave the Church and/or its members who had ongoing knowledge of the abuse of the Adams children as the likely targets of any grand jury inquiry. Attorneys representing the Church defendants in the civil lawsuit declined to comment Wednesday, citing Arizona's strict confidentiality laws related to grand juries.

Despite the delay imposed by Dickerson, a Cochise County jury was not expected to hear the children's lawsuit until late 2022 or early 2023. That trial date will be announced by Cardinal in April 2022.

Among the discovery disputes Cardinal was expected to address during the now-vacated hearing was a request by Shaunice Warr -a fellow Mormon, family friend, and former U.S. Border Patrol agent- that the judge reverse an Oct. 12 order turning over Warr's USBP employment file to the children's attorneys.

The lawsuit contends Warr, as a federal law enforcement agent, was a mandatory reporter of any known or reasonably suspected abuse. The same mandatory reporter argument is made

▼ t Dr. John Herrod, one of the two bishops, based on his professional status.

applies only to admissions of past abuse, or whether reporting is required when a clergy member has reason to believe a child is being subjected to ongoing criminal sexual abuse.

Arizona Sen. Victoria Steele has been unsuccessful the last two legislative sessions to get the statute revised to require reporting of confessional type statements if the clergy has a reasonable belief that the abuse is ongoing.

