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ROBIN RILED UP

By L.A. Parker, The Trentonian

A defense lawyer known for confounding the authorities yesterday said procedural mistakes by Trenton cops could overturn many of the criminal convictions of the past two decades.

Robin Lord, bane of Mercer County law enforcement, said a city court clerk admitted in sworn testimony Tuesday that municipal judges routinely signed arrest warrants after detectives took suspects into custody.

For at least 23 years, Lord said, arrests were made "opposite of the way it's supposed to be done legally." Lord said the revelation opens a "Pandora's box" full of potential legal challenges to thousands of criminal convictions.

The court clerk, Maria Cosme, told of the backwards procedure during a Superior Court hearing for Lord client Robert Lemar Raysor, a murder suspect who was arrested on Aug. 31, 1999. Two days later his arrest warrant was signed by a judge, Lord said.

Lord's argument is the latest headache she has created for the Mercer legal establishment. Since 1996, she has helped at least four murder suspects beat the rap, and has won several brutality cases against law officers.

Casey A. DeBlasio, spokeswoman for the Mercer County

prosecutor, scoffed at Lord's argument and said all the old convictions will stand. Under New Jersey court rules, law officers can make arrests based on probable cause with or without an arrest warrant, DeBlasio said.

Deputy Chief Paul Meyer, Trenton's top detective, said his investigators proceed correctly: "We fill out a complaint and then submit it to the judge. It's really a prosecutor's matter [when] it's an indictable offense."

A police spokesman said what Lord calls arrest warrants actually are complaint warrants used to arrest and jail someone for probable cause.

Lord said the comments of DeBlasio and Trenton police -- plus Cosme's admission that judges routinely signed arrest warrants after busts during her 23 years of service -- showed that authorities in these parts don't know the law or proper legal procedure.

"The complaint warrant is a fraud and has been for decades," said Lord. The unsigned warrants in question command "any peace officer" to make the arrest, but don't say who issued the order, Lord argued.

"Detectives or police officers are not supposed to prepare these warrants and then have the judge sign it," said Lord. "A judge is supposed to issue it first and then have the person arrested."

The potential bombshell Lord elicited from Cosme surfaced at a preliminary hearing for Raysor, one of two suspects in the slaying of Mark Cameron, 40, who was robbed of \$6 after his head was bashed in with a brick on Aug. 28, 1999. Cameron died of his injuries three weeks later at a hospital.

Within hours of the attack on Cameron, detectives were questioning Raysor's alleged accomplice, Naim Muhammad Travis. Both suspects were arrested Aug. 31.

"In this case, the arrest warrant was completed on Aug. 31, 1999, by Trenton police and signed by the judge on Sept. 2, 1999," Lord said.

"Detectives or police officers are not supposed to prepare these warrants, as was done here, and then have the judge sign it," said Lord. "A judge is supposed to issue it first and then have the person arrested."

Calling the procedure "illegal and unconstitutional," Lord called on Jersey's Attorney General to investigate.

She said Trenton's attorney should have known it was going on and suggested some detectives might have duped city judges into thinking it was okay to sign arrest warrants after suspects were hauled in.

In her testimony, for instance, Cosme said judges often signed the arrest warrants when the detectives brought in the suspect for arraignment in city court.

Cosme would not comment when contacted by The Trentonian. She referred questions to Trenton's president judge, Carmen Garcia, who did not return phone calls on Wednesday or yesterday.