

HILL TIPPED OFF TAP, COURT TOLD TESTIMONY DISPUTED IN STING OPERATION

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The niece of Mayor Coleman Young testified Tuesday that City Councilman Gilbert Hill -- then a high-ranking police official -- betrayed an FBI investigation by tipping her that her drug dealer husband's phone was tapped.

Hill denied the charge, made under oath by Cathy Curry, and government prosecutors contradicted Curry's claim by showing her a statement in which she said Sgt. James Harris -- a defendant in the current case -- betrayed the wiretap.

Curry testified in federal court in Detroit in the trial of Harris, five other officers and two civilians charged with guarding drugs and money for FBI agents posing as drug dealers in a sting operation.

The 29-year-old Curry testified on behalf of her father, civilian Willie Volsan.

Volsan's attorney, Timothy Murphy, says the FBI entrapped Volsan through manipulating his drug-addicted daughter, using money and threats until she begged her father to find officers willing to help the undercover agent.

She testified that she had told Special Agent Mike Castro, posing as a Florida drug dealer and money launderer, that Hill tipped her that the FBI was tapping the phone of her husband, **Johnny Curry**, since imprisoned after a drug conviction.

Asked if Hill was in fact the one who provided the information, she testified, "Yes," and repeated Hill's name several times under further questioning.

Her testimony was challenged by Assistant U.S. Attorney Lynn Helland, who showed Curry a report of a 1987 interview in which she told an FBI agent the tipster was Harris.

Curry, however, stuck with her version, and said she did not remember talking to the FBI agent.

Hill, reached later Tuesday, said he could not have tipped off Curry because he had no knowledge of the phone taps.

"How could I have tipped her or anyone else?" Hill said. "I have never, ever been in a position to know whose phones were being tapped by whom."

Hill added, "If I had known, I wouldn't have told anyone."

Hill has said he was approached by the agents and believed himself to be a target of the sting. He was not charged with anything. Charges against Curry have been dismissed.

In testimony on how she became involved with the FBI sting, Curry said Castro approached her while she was in Marquette undergoing her fourth try at drug rehabilitation.

Castro obtained an introduction through Curry's former boyfriend Richard Wershe, an imprisoned east side drug kingpin trying to gain favor with the government. Wershe's sister, Dawn, took Castro to Marquette in July 1990.

Curry said she was reluctant to meet someone from her Detroit background after seven months in treatment. But Dawn Wershe came to the rehab halfway house with Castro.

She said Castro slipped her his pager number with a note: "I can take care of you. Call me."

She agreed to meet him in Detroit, and testified he several times gave her cash payments of \$2,500 to set up a meeting with officers willing to guard laundered money.

She said she used the money to buy drugs, and began to fear for herself and her family if she failed to deliver. After one officer backed out of a meeting, she said she asked her father to help round up police protection.

"I took his money so I better produce," she said.

In other testimony, two of the accused officers, Charley Nichols and Booker Fullilove, took the stand to say they did not know they were being asked to guard drugs during a May 21 shipment to Detroit City Airport.

Nichols said Harris told him they were guarding a safety-conscious jeweler.

Fullilove said he never learned exactly what they were guarding.

"You got \$2,000 but you didn't know what you were protecting?" asked Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee Janice.

Fullilove said he took Harris' word it was legitimate.

Testimony is to continue today.

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Caption: Photo HERMAN ALLEN

: Cathy Curry and an unidentified man leave federal court Tuesday. She testified in the trial of eight people charged after an FBI drug sting.

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