

## Beating death case hits testimony snag

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By Charlie LeDuff

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*Southfield* -- The preliminary examination of three men accused of beating a man to death in a Southfield jazz club took on an air of absurdity Wednesday as a self-described hit man refused to testify and a jailhouse snitch said he was "just trying to do the right thing."

The three defendants -- Darnell Cooley, Eiland Johnson and Deandre Woolfolk -- were identified by a witness as the killers of Robert Alexander early Aug. 9 at Arturo's. A witness told police he saw the three men beat Alexander with a bottle, kick him and throw a pedestal at him, according to testimony given by Southfield Police Officer Christopher Clark in Southfield District Court.

The witness, Anthony Alls, was slain two weeks later. Absent Alls' testimony, prosecutors have little evidence.

About a month ago, Detroit Police videotaped a man saying he was a hit man for the *Black Mafia Family* and that Alls was killed to keep him quiet. He offered to wear a wire in exchange for leniency on his own felony charge. The defendants are reputed members of the *Black Mafia Family*, or BMF, a violent narcotics syndicate, according to police.

But before police wired the alleged hit man, his confession was brought to court by Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Jeff Hall.

The man was not publicly identified in court.

Angry with Hall and afraid for his own life, the alleged hit man refused to enter the courtroom Wednesday without a lawyer. Instead, Hall brought Maurice Traylor -- jailhouse snitch -- to the stand.

Traylor testified he was at Arturo's the night of the slaying and witnessed Cooley beating Alexander over the head with a liquor bottle and Alexander going down in a heap.

Traylor -- who said he was once paid \$4,000 by Detroit Police and often calls them with street information -- said he watched the jazz club melee for 20 minutes before leaving.

Though the nightclub was trashed, glass was broken and people were stabbed, Traylor said the only thing he saw destroyed was the bottle on Alexander's head.

Traylor was arrested two months later in Troy on suspicion of breaking and entering. It is then that Traylor instructed his lawyer to contact the police, he said.

Steve Fishman, the lawyer for Cooley, asked whether Traylor came up with a story in order get a deal from prosecutors.

"They never promised me anything," he said. "I'm just trying to do the right thing."

The hearing was adjourned until Jan. 4, while a lawyer can be found for the hit man.

Credit: Charlie LeDuff

**[Illustration]**

Defendants Deandre Woolfolk, left, Eiland Johnson and Darnell Cooley listen to testimony at their preliminary hearing on the beating death of Robert Alexander at Arturo's jazz club in August. Elizabeth Conley / The Detroit News