

INFORMANTS' DEATHS TRACED TO LAWYER

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A pair of would-be informants were executed two years ago after a Detroit lawyer known for defending members of the Best Friends drug organization told gang members who the informants were, federal prosecutors allege.

The attorney, Paul D. Curtis of Detroit, also arranged the delivery of \$600,000 to a Best Friends leader, who used the money to fund a cocaine deal in Atlanta that led to his death, prosecutors charge.

Prosecutors say Curtis violated professional ethics, including conflict of interest. They are not seeking criminal charges against him.

They are asking a judge to remove Curtis as defense attorney for **Reginald** (Rockin' Reggie) **Brown** in a federal murder case, after an informant in that case accused Curtis of making the fatal leak.

Brown is reputed to be a leader of Best Friends.

Curtis could not be reached for comment Thursday. Assistant U.S. Attorneys E. James King and F. William Soisson refused to talk about the motion they filed.

Best Friends was a murder-for-hire gang that ruled the city's drug world in the mid-to-late 1980s. It is believed responsible for as many as 80 murders. In June 1993, 29 gang members were indicted on charges including murder, cocaine sales, weapons violations and conspiracy.

In a six-page motion filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court, prosecutors charge **Brown**'s brother Terrance (Boogaloo) **Brown** ordered the executions of the two informants after Curtis told him their identities. Terrance **Brown** was killed a few months later in Atlanta after a botched drug deal.

Reginald Brown was arrested in May 1992 and charged with murdering three adults and a 3-year-old girl on Detroit's east side. One of the victims, Alfred Austin, 26, was four days away from beginning his trial on federal weapons charges.

In the motion filed Tuesday, prosecutors allege Austin was killed after Curtis gave federal documents to Best Friends leaders that indicated Austin was considering a deal in exchange for providing information against gang members. As a result, Terrance **Brown** ordered Austin's death, prosecutors said.

The documents, 33 pages of information on evidence the government had against Austin, also included a U.S. Attorney's letter hinting that Austin was considering a plea bargain.

An attorney for Austin acknowledged faxing the documents to a friend of Austin, but said he doubts Austin would let them get into the hands of the men he was considering informing on.

"He told me he was worried about some of the people he was dealing with," said Austin's lawyer, Robert Cetrulo of Covington, Ky.

At the time of the shooting, Detroit police said they believed the other adults were killed because they were witnesses to the Austin slaying and the child was the victim of a stray bullet.

In the other informant murder, prosecutors say Terrance **Brown** ordered the death of Sidney Edwards, a witness in the August 1991 murder of Bernard Lamar. Charged in that shooting was Lonnie O'Bryant, whom Curtis represents, and Charles Wilkes, who pleaded guilty.

Wilkes is the informant who told prosecutors that Curtis identified the informants to gang leaders, prosecutors said.

Curtis allegedly told Terrance **Brown** that Edwards was to testify against O'Bryant and Wilkes and "if Edwards was out of the picture they could beat the case." Terrance **Brown** ordered Edwards' death, prosecutors said.

Two other **Brown** brothers, Ezra, 24, and Gregory, 22, were shot to death within a week of each other in December 1986. They, too, were suspected of leading the Best Friends organization.

Curtis has been involved in a number of high-profile cases, representing:

- * Holland Hardaway, who was convicted in May of second-degree murder in the October 1992 shooting of undercover Detroit police officer Norman Spruiel.
- * Sylvester (Seal) Murray, alleged leader of the Young Boys Inc. heroin ring, charged with drug trafficking.
- * Cary Goins, a Young Boys member who was convicted in November 1982 in the murder of undercover Detroit police officer William Green. The Best Friends network distributed drugs in Detroit, Lexington, Ky., Toledo and Lima, Ohio. According to a 56-count federal indictment unsealed in June 1993, members also were available for contract killings and drive-by shootings to eliminate drug competition or to get revenge.

Caption: Photo

: Paul D. Curtis ***

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