

The Courier-Journal

Wednesday, April 14, 1999

LOCAL NEWS



[Local News Index](#) | [Local News Archives](#)
[C-J Extra](#) | [The Courier-Journal Home Page](#)

Lexington activist's 2nd trial opens

Berry accused of luring youths with job offers

By RICHARD WILSON, The Courier-Journal

LEXINGTON, Ky. -- Ron Berry held out the prospect of summer jobs and other rewards to six underprivileged Lexington youngsters he is accused of sodomizing two decades ago, a prosecutor said yesterday.

As Berry's second trial opened, Erwin Roberts, a Fayette County assistant commonwealth's attorney, told jurors that Berry, 55, used his position as head of a youth activities agency to take advantage of the young men. Roberts said Berry lured them to his home, where he participated in both oral and anal sex with them.

A defense lawyer said the witnesses have ulterior motives for testifying against Berry.

Berry, who is on leave from his post as executive director of Micro-City Government, has pleaded innocent to the 12 sodomy counts and two other charges of immoral or indecent practices. He was tried on the charges in September, but Fayette Circuit Judge Lewis Paisley declared a mistrial after jurors deadlocked.

Berry's legal problems have received widespread publicity since they surfaced in November 1997. For years he has been well-known as a leader among African Americans in Lexington, and he has often been called on to quell unrest, particularly among black youths.

Berry founded Micro-City, which is a miniature replica of the local city-county government, in 1969. He has been on a paid leave of absence since late 1997; he receives a salary of slightly less than \$40,000.

William E. Johnson, one of Berry's lawyers, said in his opening statements that Berry's accusers have other motives for their testimony. Some of them, Johnson said, are felons attempting to cut deals to be released from jail and others are trying to win damages from city officials for not providing more oversight of Berry's actions. A civil lawsuit is pending against the city for Berry's alleged actions.

"We believe the old adage, 'When they say "It's not the money, it's the principle," it's the money,' " Johnson told the 10 women and four men on the jury, which has 12 members and two alternates.

Johnson also told the jurors that they would hear differences in the

prosecution witnesses' stories.

"The stories, we believe, don't fit together. An effort's been made, but we don't believe that the rehearsed testimony comes out exactly the way they want it," Johnson said.

"We believe the evidence will be that Ron Berry, for some 30 years, occupied a very responsible position, helping the youth of this community, particularly the minority youth, by working with them in a very important role."

Johnson also charged that Lexington attorney Gayle Slaughter had worked diligently to get the six men to swear out the sex complaints against his client.

"She wants to be the No. 1 black in the community and take Ron Berry's place," Johnson said. "She's been extremely critical of Ron Berry."

Roberts, in his opening statements, led jurors through Berry's alleged sexual contacts with the six youths. Some of Berry's victims, he said, were boys who had gotten into trouble and were members of a social group called the Playboys Club, which Berry supervised.

Roberts said that Berry initiated his overtures to some of the boys while taking them home after Micro-City activities. The overtures, Roberts said, came after Berry and his alleged target were alone in the car. The actual sex acts, he said, occurred at Berry's home.

He said Berry was in a position to bestow favors on members of Micro-City Government, whether it was summer jobs, being part of club activities or trips to places like King's Island.

"Ladies and gentlemen, some of these boys just wanted a ride home from the defendant. Most of the victims, all of the victims, pretty much received what they wanted from the defendant. All of them were asked to do more than they ever should have done," Roberts said.

The trial is expected to continue into next week.

[BACK TO NEWS DIGEST](#)

[TO NEWS ARCHIVE](#)

TOP OF PAGE

All pages © 1998-99 [The Courier-Journal Terms of Service](#)
Send questions and comments to [The Webmaster](#)