MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Memorandum

To: Sheriff William N. Morris Jr.

From: Charles F. Holmes CFH

Subject: Los Angeles Press Facilities

Date: Jan. 15, 1969

The press arrangements for the Sirhan trial show much influence of our own research, a situation that I deem complimentary to our preparations.

Two primary differences are the use of closed circuit TV in an auxiliary press room several floors below and the use of the California Freedom of Press committee as a consultant in setting procedures for the trial.

Members of the press who used the auxiliary press room reflected mixed feelings in its regard. Some said it was a fine arrangement, but others said it could not be relied upon since the reporters were never certain who was speaking (the voice-picture distortion is enough to make quick absolute identification impossible). Philosophically, however, I think the press like the idea because it is the most that could possibly be done for them.

The state-wide standing committee was brought into the planning after the court inquired of them about accomodations for the press. Unfortunately, we do not have such a state-wide committee here and the chairman of that committee in California, Mr. Howard Williams, expressed chagrin when informed of the information leaks that occurred when we dealt with a local media committee.

Cameras for the auxiliary courtroom were provided and installed by a network pool at no charge to the County. The auxiliary press room is secure and all accredited media representatives admitted submit to a thorough search, primarily for electronic "bugs" and small cameras. The Sheriff's office keeps a machine in the room capable of detecting electronic "bugs" and uses it periodically.

There is a bank of telephones in the corridor outside the courtroom. There are 25 telephones on a shelf about 25 feet in length. It is located 10 to 15 feet from the courtroom door. Another similar bank of telephones is located in the auxiliary press room for the 90 people allowed to use it on an assigned seat basis. There are no typewriters in either locale. Teletype machines are located in the foyer outside the auxiliary press room. This lack of typewriters has caused some complaint from the press.

Any member of the press leaving either the courtroom secure area or the auxiliary press room area must be searched before reentering. There are no restrooms in the courtroom area. Members of the press are allowed to leave at any time during court, but supposedly only one at a time to not disturb the court. However, when the first juror was selected, I saw five rise and leave at one time, quickly followed by several others to go out and call in their story.

For an effort at assistance and accuracy, it might be well to provide a xeroxed list of jurors (LA admits 25 at a time) who are examined as potential jurors. The press had great difficulty getting correctly spelled names.

Two non-press features observed were the telephones inside the rail of the courtroom and the book with photographs and personal data on all allowed to enter the Jail security area.

The courtroom has two emergency lights (each with three flood lights that turned on upon failure of electrical power) that operate on batteries. They were focused out on the audience.

An emergency telephone beside a deputy's desk sets off an alarm to a squad room upon touch, bringing reinforcements to the courtroom immediately.

Los Angeles has a court coordinator working with the Judges in the matter of press coverage of the trial, as well as a 12-man information staff of the Sheriff's office. This effort is complimented by the Freedom of Information Committee..

I have detailed information on press seating there and the auxiliary press room and its TV, if it is desired. I also have a kit of news releases issued by the Sheriff's office during the past several months in regard to the case and I have a file of photographs of Sirhan that have been made by the Sheriff and released during the same period of time. I also have diagrams of the courtroom area and the auxiliary press room area.