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**By JAMES W. WADE III**

Staff Reporter

This is the third week of interviewing a total of 196 jurors; Monday ended the first phase of the trial of accused serial killer Anthony Sowell. The selection started June 3, and 79 will return on Wednesday for the second phase of questioning.

Sowell, 51, is charged with multiple counts of aggravated murder, kidnapping, abusing a corpse and tampering with evidence. He faces the death penalty if convicted, and his trial is expected to take months with as many as 132 witnesses testifying.

From those 70 plus possible jurors, the final jury of 12 will be picked, plus four alternates, will be seated. That may be concluded by the end of the week. During this first phase of jury selection, the Cuyahoga County residents were asked questions by John Turner and Rufus Sims, attorneys for Anthony Sowell, and also faced questions from assistant Cuyahoga County Prosecutors Rick Bombik and Pinkey Carr.

The attorneys are expected to interview them in larger groups on topics ranging from their occupations and preferred media to their interest in true crime TV or books, their experiences with law enforcement and whether they have ever been crime victims themselves.

Last week, Sowell waived his right to go with the jury, once it is seated, to the scene of the crimes. Before opening statements, jurors will visit the crime scene, Sowell's home on Imperial Avenue. Prior to that, Judge Dick Ambrose denied a defense request to modify a gag order which prevents them or prosecutors from making comments to the media.

The order will stay in place, which means attorneys cannot comment or offer opinions on matters relating to the case or statements regarding matters, which are not a part of the record, made in open court.

In his ruling, Judge Ambrose ruled the claims of free speech do not outweigh the Sixth Amendment rights of the accused, and of the public, to a fair trial. Eight of the 11 families signed the petition, saying they do not want to endure a trial, which would spotlight their loved ones lives and reveal gruesome details about how they died.

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Sowell faces the death penalty if convicted, and his trial is expected to take months with as many as 132 witnesses testifying. Sowell also is accused of attacking several other women who survived.

When the actual trial starts, 5 women, 4 that were attacked by Sowell and survived, will take the stand. They are expected to testify to help jurors gain an understanding of Sowell's violent patterns and motives. One of the women to testify will be Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson's niece, Lori Frazier, who lived with Sowell and had a romantic relationship with him between 2005 and 2008.

Court records indicate that the majority of the women were convicted for drug crimes that resulted in probation or treatment-based diversion programs. Two of the women pleaded guilty to assault charges but received probation in those cases, too.

Parker and Sims first requested the probation records on May 31, and in a filing last Monday they asserted a right to defend their client by every available means, including mining court records for information that could undermine the credibility of the state's witnesses.

The motion suggests the defense is interested in records involving the past crimes, substance abuse, mental condition and violent behavior of the five women in question.

County Prosecutor Bill Mason, whose office represents the Probation Department, fought to keep the records confidential, arguing in a motion filed last Tuesday that the women's previous

criminal convictions are irrelevant to the charges against Sowell.