

## Jackson trial delayed after death

Michael Jackson's trial has been delayed for a week following a death in the family of his lead defence lawyer.

Jury selection had been set to start on Monday, but will now begin on 14 February, Judge Rodney Melville said.

Separately, he said he would allow news organisations to see questionnaires filled out by some of the 250 prospective jurors.

Mr Jackson, 46, stands accused of child molestation in a case expected to last for months. He denies the charges.

Lawyers for news organisations said it was "really vital" for the responses of 250 potential jurors to be made public "to serve as a check on the process".

Judge Melville, of Santa Barbara County Superior Court, said he would read the responses and release those that did not contain confidential information.

The questionnaires are expected to be released later in the week.

'Sensationalist coverage'

The court is currently selecting 12 jurors and eight stand-by jurors for the trial.

Defence lawyers had argued against the bid by Associated Press and other news organisations to have potential jurors' responses made public.

"The release of the completed jury questionnaires does not serve any purpose other than to add to the sensationalist coverage of this case," a motion by Mr Jackson's lawyers stated.

The prosecution had agreed to the release of the forms.

The estimated total costs of the trial, expected to last five months, range from \$2.5m (£1.33m) to \$4m (£2.13m) of local taxpayers' money.

Those estimates do not include costs to the city of Santa Maria, the Superior Court or for the investigation and prosecution of the case.

The cost of security and other needs around the courthouse has been estimated at \$40,000 (£21,000) per day, said Jason Stilwell, a special projects manager at the county administrator's office.

'Good person'

Mr Jackson, 46, denies plying a boy with alcohol and molesting him.

Michael Jackson's mother has said she is "100% certain" her son did not commit the child abuse charges he faces.

Katherine Jackson told US TV network Fox News on Sunday that her pop star son told her he was innocent.

"I believe that for one reason - I know his character," she said. "He loves children. You don't molest anything that you love."

Describing Mr Jackson as "a good person", the mother-of-nine said she feared he would not be given a fair trial.

"I can't sleep thinking about what these wicked people might try to do to him," she said.

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/entertainment/music/4242989.stm>

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