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## Media want potential Jackson juror info

By Tim Molloy, Associated Press Writer

SANTA MARIA, Calif. — Jury selection in the Michael Jackson molestation case has been delayed, but media efforts to learn more about who might eventually sit in judgment of the entertainer are moving ahead.

Attorneys for news organizations were to ask Santa Barbara County Superior Court Judge Rodney S. Melville on Monday to allow reporters to view completed questionnaires filled out last week by 250 prospective jurors.

"It's really vital for the public to be able to have access to the questionnaires while the selection process is occurring ... to serve as a check on the process," said media lawyer Theodore Boutrous, who represents The Associated Press and other news organizations.

Defense attorneys have argued that jurors would be less candid if they knew their answers would be 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," Jackson's attorneys said in a motion last week.

Prosecutors and Jackson's attorneys had been scheduled to begin questioning potential jurors Monday to root out any biases that should keep them off the panel. But the court announced Friday that the questions would be delayed because the sister of Jackson's lead attorney, Thomas Mesereau, Jr., was gravely ill.

After Monday's hearing, no additional court sessions will be scheduled until Thursday at the earliest, the court said.

The cost of the trial, expected to last five months, has local officials worried about how they'll pay for it.

Estimates range wildly, from a low of about \$2.5 million to a high of about \$4 million of taxpayer money. Those estimates are for

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Santa Barbara County and don't include the costs to the city of Santa Maria, the Superior Court or for investigation and prosecution of the case.

State Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, is considering introducing a bill to help Santa Barbara County cover security and related expenses.

One estimate puts the cost of security and other needs around the courthouse on a single day at about \$40,000, Jason Stilwell, a special projects manager in the county administrator's office, told the Santa Barbara News-Press.

Some of those costs are already being covered by a consortium of news organizations that is paying \$7,500 a day for access to the courts, security, trash service, toilets and other items.

But officials argue that with more than 1,000 members of the media credentialed to cover the trial, the county is recovering only a fraction of its actual costs.

According to calculations by Santa Barbara County, the cost of handling Jackson's arraignment on Jan. 16 last year was \$157,985. That includes everything from \$35,331 in staff time to plan logistics to \$23,577 for things like fences, toilets, added trash pickup and consulting.

Jackson, 46, is charged with molesting a 13-year-old former cancer patient. He is also charged with giving the boy alcohol and conspiring to hold him and his family at Jackson's Neverland ranch. The pop superstar has pleaded not guilty to the charges and recently issued statements saying he expects to be acquitted.

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