

# Sharpton's defense opens defamation trial

By Holly McKenna  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

An attorney for civil rights activist the Rev. Al Sharpton denied in court recently that Sharpton made defamatory statements in the racially charged Tawana Brawley case of 1987.

Sharpton and two other former advisers to Brawley are being sued for defamation by former prosecutor Steven Pagonis, one of six White men the Black teenager accused of kidnapping and raping her in November 1987. All the defendants are Black.

In his opening statement, lawyer Michael Hardy said that at the time of the allegations, Sharpton had repeated in public what he had heard and believed to be reliable information.

Hardy said it was not his job to prove that Pagonis raped

Brawley, as she charged, but to show that Sharpton did not defame the former prosecutor.

"They must prove with clear and convincing evidence that the Rev. Sharpton displayed a reckless disregard for the truth, and even as Rev. Sharpton sits here in court today, he believes the story of Tawana Brawley, he believes what information was told to him," Hardy told the six-member jury in Duchess County courtroom in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

To collect damages from public figures, plaintiffs in defamation suits must prove that statements about them were made with "malice" — either know them to be false or with reckless disregard for their truth or falsehood.

Pagonis claims that Sharpton and the other defendants publicly accused

him of being a rapist on at least 30 occasions, thus defaming his character and damaging his reputation. In 1988, a New York state grand jury dismissed Brawley's charges as a hoax and exonerated the accused men, including Pagonis.

"When you have a young Black girl making allegations of rape against White law enforcement officials, you can't go to the top to get justice because they suppress it. That's how you get an Al Sharpton. Somebody has to rise up," Hardy said.

Pagonis' attorney Bill Stanton began questioning one of the defendants, C. Vernon Mason, 51, a lawyer who was disbarred for bilking clients. Stanton did admit that they had no evidence to back up their claims against Pagonis.

"She looked like a person



AL SHARPTON

who suffered severe trauma. She couldn't walk and her emotional state was like someone who had been raped," Mason said of Brawley's condition two weeks after the alleged attack.

Holly McKenna writes for the Afro Times.

# 'Girl X' fundraiser denies wrongdoing

By Karen Shields  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A lawyer representing the chief fundraiser for "Girl X," the nine-year-old, whose story made headlines after she was raped and left for dead in a Chicago housing project last January, is denying that his client has misused funds collected for the youngster.

Ralph Bernstein, a lawyer for Beverly Reed said he is confident that his client is not guilty of any wrongdoing after Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan filed a lawsuit to freeze the Girl X account. Ryan said that his office is investigating whether or not Reed violated any criminal statutes in her handling of the fund.

"We are seeking answers on what happened to the money and assurances from the court that the funds will be preserved and directed towards "Girl X" and her family," Ryan said.

Addressing allegations that Reed misappropriated funds, Bernstein said, "she has no personal interest in those funds."

In addition, Bernstein said there was a two-fold explanation as to why more money hadn't been given to Girl X's family, who he says wanted the entire fund turned over to members.

First, he said, his client had doubts that the family would actually use the money to benefit the child. Secondly, there were concerns that if the family received the money it could destroy Girl X's SSI and Medicare benefits, because "it would be deemed that she (Girl X) owned the funds," Bernstein said.

According to Ryan's Charitable Trust and Solicitation Bureau, the Girl X fund has taken in more than \$310,000, and from that only \$1,125 has been given to Girl X and her family, while about \$52,000 has been taken out of the fund.

In filing the lawsuit, the Attorney General's office sought to temporarily and permanently stop Reed from having any association with the fund and to also require her to make a full disclosure of all her expenditures connected with the fund.

Furthermore, an issue of perjury has arisen because Reed, reportedly while under oath, signed a statement stating that she had not been convicted of any crimes.

Karen Shields writes for the Chicago Defender.

# Wife of baptist leader decries husband's vilification

By Judy Candis  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Despite being advised to remain silent, the wife of beleaguered National Baptist Convention head, the Rev. Henry Lyons, said she is speaking out to blunt the continual attacks on her husband's character.

"Now I must speak. For not

only is my family being investigated, but the man I love and respect, who is also my best friend, is being viewed in an unfavorable light," Deborah Lyons said. "I have known this man for nearly 30 years, and the person they are portraying in the media is not the man neither I nor my children recognize."

Lyons' recent speech was her first public foray into the scandal since she was arrested for setting fire to a house deeded to her husband and an employee of the convention. Lyons was in Africa with the woman during the incident. Allegations have surfaced claiming Lyons used money from the convention to

purchase gifts for the woman, who is also a convicted criminal.

"They have twisted every kindness he has ever tried to show others and this is deplorable," she said.

"There has never been a human being more generous, thoughtful of others and who

(See Lyons, Page 18)

# Rawlinson

(Continued from Page 1)

wrangling between the White House and the 105th Congress over a nominee's record can be hashed out.

Reid expects quick confirmation. Of the 43 judicial nominations before the Senate Judiciary since 1995, only nine judges have received confirmations.

If confirmed, Rawlinson said, "I promise to be a judge who is fair, firm and one whom Sen. Reid will never have to apologize for."

Reid praised Rawlinson, saying she can fill the judgeship better than anyone else in Nevada. "By reputation, experience and the opinion of her peers, she will do an outstanding job," he said.

The gala also served as tribute to the 44-year-old mother of three.

"We're here to celebrate a historic opportunity to have a black female American who is being recognized nationally," Cranford Crawford said. "We've put together a response from the community, effectively acknowledging that there are people here in Las Vegas who are more than qualified to meet any challenge." He urged Rawlinson's out-of-state supporters to write their senators and ask for them to support her nomination.

Rawlinson's has a laundry

list of accomplishments including the "Woman of Distinction Award" from the Professional Black Woman's Alliance, "The Distinguished Service Award" from the Clark County Bar Association and "The Award for Outstanding Service" from the National Bar Association.

Urban Chamber of

Commerce President Harvey Phelps said Rawlinson would be an outstanding U.S. District Judge

Said Larry Gamell, Public Relations director of the Community Health Centers: "This occasion tonight will be momentous if it creates momentum," for her confirmation.



Easy In-House Financing



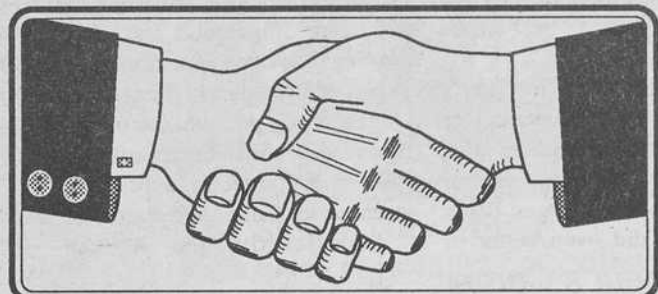
WIN PEARSON

**• BANKRUPTCY •  
BAD CREDIT • NO CREDIT  
FORECLOSURE • DIVORCE  
• REPOSSESSIONS •  
NO PROBLEM!!**

**We give you back your down payment  
or receive a VISA credit card\***

**3333 East Fremont Street  
(702) 457-1602** (See dealer for details)

# EOB MICRO MALL OPENED!



330 WEST WASHINGTON, SUITE 3  
(in the KCEP 88.1 FM complex)  
on the corner of D St. & Washington

# Shopping for the Favorite Gift!

After Church Every Sunday  
8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Rare Art! Incense!  
Ethnic Figurines! Ethnic Clothes!

# Great Bar-B-Que! Catfish & Greens!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL  
(702) 647-7735