

POSITION PAPER
WITNESS IMMUNITY

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem

There are basically two types of immunity: transactional and use and derivative use immunity (hereinafter "use immunity"). Transactional immunity means that once a witness has been compelled to testify about an incident, he may never be prosecuted for offenses arising out of that transaction even if independent evidence of the offense(s) -- from a source other than the witness -- comes to light. Use immunity, a shorthand term for use and derivative use immunity, means that once a witness has been compelled to testify about an offense, neither that testimony nor any evidence derived from that testimony may be used against the witness. If independent evidence is discovered, or has been preserved, the witness theoretically may still be prosecuted for the offense.

Obviously, in situations in which insider information about criminal activity is necessary in order to prosecute criminal activity, the prosecutor is faced with unenviable alternatives when only transactional immunity is available.

For example, assume a scenario in which a narcotics network is functioning effectively with a hierarchy in which the first echelon leader is a prosperous, "white collar" professional who has never been convicted of a crime. That individual, who we can refer to as "Kingpin", provides the capital necessary to purchase the narcotics which is distributed to users. He never has his hand on the narcotics and enters only into cash transactions. Kingpin, however, relies upon a certified public accountant ("A") and an individual who monitors the actual narcotics trafficking network ("B").

Kingpin may never be successfully prosecuted without information from "A" or "B". There may not be enough evidence against "A" or "B" to prosecute them for their role in the

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conspiracy.

A resourceful prosecutor, who could be investigating Kingpin for narcotics violations or criminal violations of the income tax code would subpoena "A" or "B" before the grand jury at which time "A" and "B" would invoke their privilege against self-incrimination. Under the present law, the prosecutor would then face the dilemma of having to give "A" or "B" transactional immunity or a total exemption from liability for their misdeeds. "A" or "B", then, could conceivably not be prosecuted for their role in the conspiracy on either the state or federal level. If granted transactional immunity, they also conceivably may not incur civil liability for their involvement. "A" or "B" conceivably may not incur civil tax liability in the form of penalties and "A" conceivably may not face professional discipline in the form of license suspension or revocation by his professional licensing authority. To permit "A" or "B" to walk away from their misdeeds would truly be a miscarriage of justice.

B. The Resolution

The resolution of the dilemma is to provide the prosecutor with use immunity to permit the prosecutor to build a tax prosecution case against Kingpin by immunizing "A" from the use of "A's" testimony against him, or a narcotics case by immunizing "B" from the use of his testimony against him. "A" and "B" could still be prosecuted for their involvement in the conspiracy, could still be forced to pay civil tax penalties and "A" could still be subject to discipline on a professional basis. Certainly, consideration of appropriate sanctions against "A" and "B" should and must include all possibilities given the magnitude of their involvement in the crime.

II. PROPOSED GENERAL IMMUNITY STATUTE

The proposed statute is based substantially on the federal immunity statutes: 18 U.S.C. §§6001-04 (1985). Changes made in the language are primarily those required by the differences

between the organizational structure of law enforcement agencies in the federal and state systems.

The proposed general immunity statute differs substantively from existing Maryland statutes in three ways:

1. It provides for use and derivative use instead of transactional immunity;
2. It is generally available rather than limited to specific crimes;
3. It has built-in procedural safeguards which must be complied with prior to its utilization. Generally, the present statutes operate automatically.

The proposed immunity statute would replace the immunity provisions for specific crimes. Presently, Maryland has separate immunity provisions for the following crimes: Article 27, §23, Bribery of Public Officials;^{1/} Article 27, §24, Bribery of Athletic Participants; Article 27, §39, Conspiracy to Commit Bribery;^{2/} Gambling or Lottery Violations; Article 27, §298, Controlled Dangerous Substances; Article 27, §262, Gambling; Article 27, §371, Lottery Violations; Article 27, §400, Selling Liquor to Minors; Article 27, §540, Sabotage Prevention; Article 33, §26-16, Election Irregularities; Financial Institutions §9-

^{1/}Article III, §50 of the Constitution of Maryland requires the General Assembly to adopt a bribery statute conferring transactional immunity. Article 27, §§23 and 39 are the response to the mandate. Consequently, absent a constitutional amendment, immunity for bribery must continue to be "transactional" as opposed to the more limited "use and derivative use" immunity.

^{2/}Transactional immunity for conspiracy to commit bribery also would not be affected since it has constitutional overtones.

III. BASES FOR USE IMMUNITY

A. Legal Basis for Use Immunity

In 1892, the Supreme Court held unconstitutional a federal immunity statute which barred the introduction of compelled testimony but permitted it to be used to locate other evidence.^{4/} The Court reasoned -- correctly -- that such derivative use of the tainted evidence rendered the immunity meaningless. But rather than simply stating that the Constitution required derivative use immunity; i.e., immunity from both the introduction of compelled testimony and exploitation of the testimony to find leads, the opinion spoke in broad language which seemed to require transactional immunity. Consequently, Congress enacted a transactional immunity statute which was upheld by the Supreme Court,^{5/} and which became the model for state legislation. In 1970, Congress repealed the transactional immunity statutes and enacted a new use immunity statute, 18 U.S.C. §§6001-04 (1970). When the Supreme Court reviewed the new statute, it held that the transactional immunity language in Counselman which had been relied on for almost one hundred years was dicta. Thus, the Court held that the new statute which bars the use and derivative use of information obtained under a grant of immunity provides the protection required by the Fifth Amendment.^{6/}

Maryland's transactional immunity statutes, like the federal

^{3/} Immunity in the savings and loan situation would remain the same since the duration of the immunity accorded to the investigation of the pending matters would be limited to one more extension of the sunset provisions.

^{4/} Counselman v. Hitchcock, 142 U.S. 547 (1892).

^{5/} Brown v. Walker, 161 U.S. 591 (1896).

^{6/} Kastigar v. United States, 406 U.S. 441 (1972).

Immunity statutes repealed in 1970, are based upon an incorrect interpretation of the 1892 decision. It is now clear that use immunity will meet constitutional requirements. Maryland's laws are, therefore, outdated.

B. Practical Bases for Use Immunity

In addition to providing the possibility that a witness given use immunity may be subject to subsequent prosecution for his criminal activity, i.e., the Oliver North prosecution, and would be subject to collateral consequences, use immunity provides for more complete disclosure of evidence than transactional immunity. As Professor G. Robert Blakely stated at the 1974 Seminar of the National Associations of Attorneys General:

With transactional immunity all the witness has to do is mention the transaction; he does not have to fill in the details. So his attorney can tell him to just mention it, and then say, "I don't remember." But with a "use" statute, a smart attorney advises his client to tell all he knows, because the more he tells, the less can be later used against him. So "use" statutes encourage fuller disclosure by witnesses, and that is what they are really all about.

As a result, individuals testifying under a grant of use immunity have greater reason to disclose their involvement.^{7/}

Further, a general immunity statute, instead of the present patchwork quilt of immunity statutes for particular crimes, would likewise be more conducive to full disclosure of evidence by an immunized witness. Often testimony about a drug transaction will encompass other crimes, such as violations of criminal tax statutes. Under the present system, a witness subpoenaed to testify pursuant to the immunity provisions of Article 27, §298

^{7/}Whether transactional or use witness immunity does not preclude prosecution for perjury or making false statements under oath.

(Controlled Dangerous Substances) may not refuse to testify because testimony regarding the controlled dangerous substances transaction would simultaneously implicate him in the commission of other crimes, e.g., tax perjury.^{8/} Yet this circumstance presents the possibility of a trap for the unwary prosecutor inquiring into drug violations and inadvertently granting transactional immunity for some previously unknown criminal activity.

Further, there are no procedural safeguards in the present immunity statutes and consequently their operation is triggered haphazardly, without identification of when a witness begins to receive immunity. The statutes also provide an "automatic immunity bath". Across the nation,^{9/} witnesses subpoenaed before the grand jury must either assert the privilege against self-incrimination or else notify the prosecutor that it is their intention to do so. The prosecutor then asks the court to order testimony and certifies that the immunity conferred thereby is in the public interest. This is the procedure set out in this proposed statute and is the procedure incorporated in the recently adopted savings and loan immunity legislation. In sharp contrast, most present Maryland statutes immunize everyone who answers questions in the grand jury.^{10/} No assertion of the privilege is required, nor is there any requirement of a certification that the immunity is in the public interest. The uncertainty of when the statute is applicable, coupled with the blanket automatic transactional immunity bath, makes Maryland immunity statutes both haphazard and dangerous. Unless a

^{8/} In re: Criminal Investigation No. 1-162, 307 Md. 622 (1987).

^{9/} Witness Immunity, National Association of Attorneys General, August, 1978.

^{10/} State v. Panagoulis, 253 Md. 699 (1969) (Witness who appeared voluntarily before grand jury to make statement and was then asked questions was "compelled" to testify within meaning of bribery immunity statutes).

prosecutor is very conversant in the vagaries of investigative grand jury law, he or she accidentally may immunize potential targets. As a consequence of the risks arising from the broad automatic immunity received by anyone subpoenaed before a grand jury investigating drugs, gambling and election laws, the grand jury frequently becomes unusable as an investigative tool in these areas. The result is that the financial aspects of large drug operations cannot be investigated by Maryland grand juries.

Finally, despite the broad brush immunization the present statutes provide, they may ironically deprive potential defendants of the opportunity to provide exculpatory evidence to a grand jury. A prosecutor who might otherwise consent to the appearance of a defendant who want to testify before an investigative grand jury or -- the more common occurrence -- a prosecutor who is willing to call a witness supportive of the defense, may decline to do so because he fears automatic immunization. There are no immunity waiver statutes and the question of whether the automatic immunity can be waived has yet to be resolved by the appellate courts.

IV. PROPOSED STATUTE

The proposed statute substitutes use for transactional immunity^{11/} because of the additional fact-finding utility that use immunity provides. It would automatically bring the Maryland law into accord with the Supreme Court's current view of the breadth of the Fifth Amendment.

The proposed statute is made generally applicable primarily for two reasons. It assures the compellability of the testimony regarding a transaction which may involve a variety of interrelated crimes and thus circumvents any constitutional

^{11/} Transactional immunity for the crime of bribery is retained because of its constitutional underpinning and for the savings and loan investigation because of its limited duration.

problem which may presently exist.^{12/} Secondly, it is now apparent that a grand jury may be an inappropriate forum for the investigation of a variety of crimes, particularly large scale drug operations, money laundering, and tax perjury. The existence of a generally available but limited immunity statute would remedy the dual problems of no immunity for most crimes and too much immunity for drugs, gambling and elections offenses.

By far the most significant changes provided by the proposed statute are procedural. Immunity would no longer be conferred automatically or accidentally, but rather only through court order. To ensure coordinated, responsible requests for immunity, the decision to seek a court order requires approval by the State's Attorney, Attorney General or State Prosecutor. The State's Attorney, the Attorney General or State Prosecutor will thereby have central control and ultimate responsibility for the issuance of grants of immunity.

The judicial role under this statute is ministerial. The judge verifies that:

1. The State's Attorney, the Attorney General, or State Prosecutor has approved the request for an immunity order;
2. The witness has refused or is likely to refuse to testify;
3. The prosecutor has determined that the witness's testimony may be necessary to be the public interest.

Once the judge concludes these three requirements are met, he issues a court order compelling testimony and immunizing the witness.

The Judge will not himself determine whether the witness'

^{12/} Cf. In re Criminal Investigation No. 1-162, supra. n.6, (witness must reasonably fear prosecution for one of enumerated offenses).

testimony may be necessary to the public interest. To do so would transform the Judge into a prosecutor and require him to make delicate prosecutorial judgments which are inappropriate. Furthermore, a particular immunity grant may be a very small aspect to a large scale investigation, making it impossible for the judge to make any meaningful evaluation of the public interest.