

Sun-Times Media fights for open Drew hearing

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The lawyers for accused wife killer Drew Peterson tried to throttle public access to a landmark evidentiary hearing less than two weeks away, but Sun-Times Media won't give in without a fight.

Sun-Times Media attorney Damon Dunn crafted an emergency motion objecting to a bid by Peterson's legal team to ban the public from a Jan. 19 pretrial hearing. Seth Stern, another Sun-Times Media attorney, plans to file the motion in Joliet this morning, Dunn said.

Sun-Times Media is The Herald-News' parent company.

The Associated Press and the Tribune Co. have joined in the effort as well.

Peterson's attorneys asked Judge Stephen White to shut the public out of the potentially explosive hearing to determine what -- if any -- hearsay evidence will be allowed at Peterson's upcoming murder trial. Peterson was arrested in May and charged with drowning his third wife, Kathleen Savio, in March 2004.

Peterson is also the sole suspect in the state police investigation of the disappearance of his fourth wife, Stacy Peterson. State police believe Stacy Peterson, who vanished in October 2007, may be the victim of foul play, but have failed to find her body or to bring criminal charges in connection with their "potential homicide" investigation.

The request to kill media access is an abrupt switch in strategy for Peterson and his legal team. Both Peterson and the longest serving of his four lawyers, Joel Brodsky have pandered to the press, and two sources who had been privy to Peterson's financial arrangements said Brodsky's compensation for taking the case came exclusively from funds generated through publicity. Brodsky failed to return calls for comment on this allegation.

Seeking spotlight

Dunn's motion points out Peterson's apparent love of the limelight, saying Peterson "has been subject to widespread publicity for many years."

"Indeed, (Peterson) has so actively sought the media spotlight that the Court has found it necessary on occasion to restrain him," the emergency motion says.

White has taken steps to restrain Peterson. After the disgraced former Bolingbrook cop called from jail to a Chicago radio station to tell jokes, the judge forbade him from telephoning anyone not on an approved list.

White also put Peterson's lawyers in check by issuing a gag order prohibiting them from discussing discovery evidence.

Charles B. Pelkie, the spokesman for the state's attorney's office, declined to comment on the Sun-Times Media motion. Prosecutors also have yet to respond to the request by Peterson's lawyers.

White is scheduled to address the motion by Peterson's lawyers today. Stern was set to attend on behalf of Sun-Times Media.