

# Los Angeles Times

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Dear Paul Weber and fellow League Directors;

Your blog post "*Los Angeles Times Story Threatens Safety of Key Witness*" raises an important question regarding the naming of gang witnesses at trials by the media. But rather than discussing the substance of the debate, you launched an unprofessional and baseless attack on one of our reporters. Your members deserve to know all the facts.

For the story at issue, our reporter was in court, notebook in hand, for two days of the preliminary hearing. Not once did the detectives or two prosecutors in the case request that she withhold the witnesses' identities. Nor did the prosecutors ask the court for any special accommodations out of concern for the witnesses' safety. Both prosecutors were interviewed by our reporter prior to publication of the story, yet never mentioned any safety concerns. One prosecutor, in fact, confirmed the spelling of a witness' name for her. Had we been asked to protect the witnesses' identities, we would have carefully considered that request, as we always do.

The names of the three witnesses, including the 15-year-old whom you criticize us for identifying, were hardly closely guarded secrets. Their identities were known to the defendants on trial, their attorneys, their families and friends. Additionally, the 15-year-old and another witness have previously been named in other media reports. The 15-year-old's name, and the content of his earlier testimony in the same case, had been publicly available on the Internet for months prior to the Times story.

Reporters and editors at The Times do not have a blanket policy of withholding the names of all gang witnesses identified at public court hearings. We believe there is a strong public interest, recognized by the courts, in not having witnesses testify anonymously. Public identification of witnesses is a potential check against perjured testimony. That said, we carefully consider whether to withhold a person's identity when we have been made aware of threats to his or her safety. Such decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

The League's blog makes no mention of the duty prosecutors and law enforcement officials have to protect gang witnesses. I have no problem with the League criticizing the paper's decision to identify gang witnesses in this case or any other. I do object to the League seeking to undermine a reporter's reputation without presenting the matter in context.

Sincerely,

Matt Lait  
Los AngelesTimes  
Law Enforcement/Courts Editor