

Bonding Firm

SM 8/22/69
Lawyer Is

Indicted Here

Ralph Kaskell, attorney for Maryland National Insurance Company, has been indicted by the Orleans Parish Grand Jury on a charge of extortion.

The Grand Jury returned the indictment against Kaskell yesterday, charging the attorney in connection with an alleged threat on an assistant district attorney who was attempting to collect bond forfeitures.

Kaskell, a member of the law firm of Deutsch, Kerrigan and Stiles, testified before the grand jury for about two and a half hours yesterday before being indicted.

HE IS ACCUSED of telling Assistant DA Shirley Wimberly Jr. that he would reveal a crime by former First Assistant DA Charles R. Ward unless the DA's office agreed to accept a lesser sum than the \$720,000 Maryland National owes in forfeited bail bonds.

Kaskell today issued this statement:

"I have just learned that I have been indicted on a charge of alleged extortion. Without meaning to criticize the grand jury, I believe that perfectly proper professional conduct of mine has simply become distorted in the bitterness of a political campaign.

"All I did was disclose to an assistant district attorney evidence supporting my client's position in a civil controversy, and it is unfortunate that this indictment means that no attorney can in the future disclose such evidence to counsel for a public official without risking criminal prosecution.

"I have not broken any law. If this charge is ever brought to trial, I will be completely vindicated."

Ward, who resigned his job on June 17 and announced his intention to run against DA Jim Garrison, revealed that certain officials of Maryland National had accused him in affidavits of accepting bribes so that he would not press for collection of the forfeited bail bonds.

The grand jury also returned an indictment of aggravated rape against another man in an unrelated case.