

STATE ASKS \$10 MILLION IN DAMAGES FROM LIFE

By VERNON A.
GUIDRY JR.

BATON ROUGE (AP)

—The state of Louisiana today filed suit against Life magazine asking a \$10 million libel judgment for an article that alleged the Mafia dominates the state.

Gov. John McKeithen, speaking at a news conference, said his attorneys advised him against suing Life as an individual.

"They recommended that it be filed in the name of the

state," McKeithen said. "By suing for the state rather than myself, we can cover all the allegations."

MCKEITHEN SAID his earlier remarks relating to the suit and the need for an independent investigation had been misinterpreted.

The governor said he felt civil libel suit was the best vehicle to air the allegations made by Life and the state's defense.

He did not say, McKeithen maintained, that the suit would make a legislative investigation unnecessary.

The suit was filed against

Time, Inc., owner of Life, in the 19th Judicial District of state court, rather than federal court which was another recommendation McKeithen said came from his attorneys.

"THE STATE has a right and duty to bring this action on its own account for account of its citizens of the injury inflicted by this malicious publication," the suit said.

"The article has harmed and will continue to harm the state in diverting business and industry and people from Louisiana with the loss of tax

revenue to the state, the necessity of expending more sums through its Board of Commerce and Industry and other agencies in an effort to overcome its ill effect, and even loss of jobs and business opportunities for the people of this state as well as for their humiliation and wounded feelings," the suit continued.

The legal action contended Life magazine has "libeled the state of Louisiana, has brought the state into disrepute, and has exposed the state and its citizens to public contempt or ridicule by picturing them as people who

are incompetent, dishonest and ignorant."

The article in the April 10 edition of Life alleged reputed Mafia boss Carlos Marcello dominates Louisiana and has heavy influence in the executive branch of government, particularly the revenue department.

IN A KEY portion of the suit, the state maintains that the prime author of the article, David Chandler, had "special opportunities to become familiar with the facts"

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because he was issued" a commission as special officer with the Louisiana state police . . . which he held from September 28, 1967, through October 1, 1968."

Chandler apparently was given the commission after McKeithen returned from a 1967 New York conference with Life editors on an article which alleged at that time that Mafia influence reached the governor's office.

McKeithen ordered an investigation which eventually was conducted by East Baton Rouge Parish Dist. Atty. Sergeant Pitcher who said he found no links with the Capitol and the Mafia.

McKeithen has characterized the recent Life article as a collection of "unmitigated lies."

HE ESTABLISHED a committee within his administration to probe the allegations of the magazine.

The committee issued its report last week. It drew no conclusions of its own, ignored some allegations, countered others with income tax file information, and offered affidavits on face value in answer to others.

The committee report confirmed, however, the Life allegation that revenue department chief counsel Emmett Batson had failed to file 1966 and 1967 income tax returns until directed to do so in 1969 by department head Ashton Mouton.

McKeithen said today he planned to take no personnel action on the basis of the committee findings "at this time."

THE GOVERNOR also announced at the news conference that he will fly to Washington Monday at the invitation of President Nixon.

McKeithen said the trip would prevent him from addressing the opening session of the State Legislature Monday but added that he would make the traditional opening address when he returns Tuesday. The governor also had planned to discuss the school desegregation issue Monday with the Monroe City School Board.