

Editors Seek Open Hearings In O'Hara Case

The public's right to know will be violated by secret hearings by the state Supreme Court on removal proceedings against Criminal Dist. Court Judge Malcolm O'Hara, says the Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press Association.

The association, made up of newspaper executives, said yesterday in a letter to Chief Justice John B. Fournet that a special hearing on the O'Hara case should be held in public.

STATE ATTY. Gen. Jack P. F. Gremillion brought the impeachment suit against O'Hara after being petitioned by a group of citizens.

The state alleges the judge tried to obtain evidence to overturn the federal court conviction of Teamsters Union President James R. Hoffa on jury tampering charges.

The state Supreme Court, which will decide disposition of the removal suit, appointed a commissioner to draw up the charges against the judge with the hearing to be held in secret.

"WE WISH to point out respectfully that the people have a direct interest in this hearing . . ." said the letter.

"Proceedings seeking the removal of Judge O'Hara were initiated by a group of citizen taxpayers, acting under the authority of state law.

"These and other citizens have a right to know all the facts concerning the charges against Judge O'Hara.

"We feel that in view of the wide general knowledge concerning this case, a secret proceeding at any stage of the removal process may seriously damage the public's confidence in the judiciary.

"THERE IS, in the minds of many citizens, a belief that all the facts in the case against Judge O'Hara, or in any other such case, should be made a part of the public record at the time the hearing takes place."

The letter was signed by Jack Gates, association president and executive editor of the Monroe Morning World and News-Star, and Truman Stacey, chairman of the association's Freedom of Information Committee and editor of the Lake Charles American Press.