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Sirhan Attorney

LOS ANGELES AP - A veteran Los Angeles criminal attorney agreed today to handle, without fee and as a public service, the fense on a murder charge of the man accused of assassinating Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

He is Russell E. Parsons, who describes himself as a "journeyman, hardworking lawyer" who has tried about 5,000 cases in 40 years as a prosecutor and later a defender.

His client is Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, the slender 24-year-old Jordanian who is accused of firing the bullet that fatally wounded Kennedy last June 5.

The public defender's office had been representing Sirhan since his arrest, but he had said from the start he would prefer to have a representative of the Los Angeles bar represent him.

Parsons told a newsman he had not met Sirhan but would visit him later today.

"I have been interested in the case all along," he said, "and I've thought about it and studied it. I'm just going to work hard and do the very best I can."

Asked his ages, Parsons said he's in his late 60s - "exact ages aren't important."

First word that Parsons would take the case came from attorney A. L. Wirin of the American Civil Liberties Union, who has consulted Sirhan regularly since his arrest and helped him find a defender.

Wirin said that now that Sirhan has obtained the counsel of his choice, "his constitutional right to counsel is being fully protected and the interest of the American Civil Liberties Union in his case is ended." Wirin added that selection of Parsons in no way was a reflection on the public defender's office.

Parsons was born in Los Angeles and is a graduate of the University of Southern California. He served for two years as a deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County before entering private practice.

As a defender he successfully argued the case of Charles C. Cahan, a bookmaker convicted with the help of a recording device. In a precedental case affecting search and seizure procedures, a court overturned the conviction.

Parsons also defended mobster Mickey Cohen against income tax evasion charges and handled the defense of underworld figure Joe Sica in a boxing conspiracy-extortion case.

Meanwhile, four Jordanian lawyers who had said they might come here to help defend Sirhan canceled their trip. They gave no explanation.

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