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NEIGHBORHOOD RECOVERY INITIATIVE PROBE: Feds ramp up pressure on state panel to delay calling witnesses

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD - The U.S. attorney overseeing a probe of [Gov. Pat Quinn's](http://www.nexis.com/search/XMLCrossLinkSearch.do?bct=A&risb=21_T21308977520&returnToId=20_T21309563244&csi=11064&A=0.854421503144062&sourceCSI=162599&indexTerm=%23PE000A4UW%23&searchTerm=Gov.%20Pat%20Quinn's%20&indexType=P) Neighborhood Recovery Initiative anti-violence program ramped up the pressure Tuesday on a legislative panel to steer clear of calling any potential criminal witnesses to testify.

U.S. Attorney James A. Lewis wrote to the co-chairs of the Legislative Audit Commission to reiterate a request made last week of the panel from an aide to Attorney General Eric Holder not to seek testimony for 90 days from any of seven subpoenaed witnesses involved in the rollout and implementation of the $54.5 million program. The witnesses are all former members of Quinn's inner circle.

The bipartisan, 12-member panel is scheduled to start a two-day hearing Wednesday in Chicago.

"The assistant attorney general made that request to the commission on behalf of the Department of Justice and our office because we are conducting an ongoing criminal investigation as to conduct associated with NRI," Lewis said.

The request was made, he said, "because we are genuinely concerned that interviews and testimony about the matter during this 90-day time period would pose several substantial risks to our ongoing criminal investigation.

It was unclear Tuesday how the audit commission intends to proceed.

Neither Sen. Jason Barickman, R-Bloomington, nor Rep. Frank Mautino, D-Spring Valley, the co-chairs of the panel, returned phone calls Tuesday.

But a joint statement from Senate Minority Leader Christine Radogno, R-Lemont, and House Minority Leader Jim Durkin, R-Western Springs, made clear the panel expects all of the subpoenaed witnesses to show up, even if it's still uncertain whether the commission will honor Lewis' request.

"The bipartisan, bicameral Legislative Audit Commission will consider the U.S. attorney and Department of Justice request at the public hearing," according to a joint statement issued by their offices. "The Legislative Audit Commission will convene as planned. All witnesses - including those subpoenaed - are expected to attend as scheduled."

An attorney for one of the star witnesses, Barbara Shaw former executive director of the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, said he and his client have not been given any indication of what to expect Wednesday.

Shaw's lawyer, John Theis, would not say whether Shaw would answer questions before the committee or assert her Fifth Amendment rights.