

Inmate deserves new trial in 1986 slayings, lawyer says

State witness stirs doubts, court told

By Jeff Coen

Tribune staff reporter

A lawyer for Jason Gray told a Cook County judge Thursday that her client deserves a new trial in the 1986 slayings of three men at a neighborhood party, a crime for which Gray is serving a life sentence.

Evidence and witness accounts since his 1988 trial point to Gray's innocence in the case, attorney Jennifer Bonjean told Judge Fred Suria. Two men who testified against him have recanted, and the state's key witness, a woman who was 13 when she allegedly saw Gray, then 15, fire into the party, has not offered a consistent account.

Bonjean said Joann McGuire Campbell, known as Holly, has told friends, Gray's lawyers and even Suria that she is not sure

what she saw at the Southwest Side party in November 1986. Suria signaled in past hearings that he is troubled by the case.

No one expects the witness to recall every detail of what she saw so long ago, Bonjean said, but Gray's conviction should not stand if Campbell's identification of him is uncertain.

"It's not too much to ask, when you're sending someone to prison for the rest of their life, that that fact hold up over time," Bonjean said.

Thursday was set aside for Bonjean to make her argument at the evidentiary hearing on Gray's case. Prosecutors are expected to argue and perhaps call witnesses on Dec. 11 in an effort to bolster Gray's conviction, with Bonjean then calling witnesses in rebuttal.

To support her argument, Bonjean filed two large volumes of documents containing numerous reports and affidavits in the case, including those of Gray's one-time co-defendant

and witnesses against him who now say he was not present at the party where the triple homicide took place.

Bonjean also filed affidavits from former friends of Campbell's who have said she told them that she did not see who shot into the party.

Also included were the statements of at least two witnesses who said they saw three dark-haired Hispanic boys with a gun near the site of the shooting minutes before the crime. Gray

is Caucasian.

"None of [the boys whom they saw] was a white kid," Bonjean said. "And interestingly, they told police that the same night."

At least one of those witnesses could testify next week.

After the hearing, Gray's mother, Nellie LaGrand, said she is optimistic her son will get another day in court. "A lot of stuff that happened in court back then was a lot of lies. Now I'm praying and hoping it will end and he will come home."