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# The Times-Picayune

## Appeals court asked to void its ruling

*Times-Picayune acts in Copeland case*

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From staff reports

When an appeals court ruled last week that a child support order involving restaurateur Al Copeland and his third wife cannot be kept secret, the court took the unusual step of rendering an unrequested opinion that the explanation behind that order can be shielded from public view.

Tuesday, The Times-Picayune asked the appeals court to withdraw the part of its ruling that allows the explanation to remain secret.

Copeland and Luan Hunter have been engaged in a six-year legal tug of war since their divorce in April, 2000.

The case became a central focus of the federal government's wide-ranging Operation Wrinkled Robe investigation into Jefferson Parish Courthouse corruption. Former Judge Ronald Bodenheimer pleaded guilty to conspiring to fix the divorce case in Copeland's favor. Copeland has not been charged with a crime and has denied knowledge of the conspiracy.

In the most recent chapter, Copeland and Hunter engaged in a heated court fight over how much child support he should pay for the care of Alex, the only child from their 10-year marriage.

After a one-day trial, 24th Judicial District Court Judge Hans Liljeberg on Aug. 7 issued a ruling and written reasons. At Copeland's request, the judge sealed both.

On Aug 21, The Times-Picayune objected to the secrecy of the ruling, but the paper did not object to the decision to keep the written reasons for the ruling secret.

Last week, the 5th Circuit granted the newspaper's request and ordered the ruling unsealed.

But the three judges, Clarence E. McManus, Walter J. Rothschild and Fredericka Wicker, went on to say that they agreed with Liljeberg's order that kept secret the reasons for his ruling.

Tuesday, The Times-Picayune asked the judges to abandon that part of their order. Attorney Lori Mince said the newspaper did not seek to unseal Liljeberg's reasons.

Mince said the judges erred in affirming a secrecy order that had not been challenged, and they ruled in favor of confidentiality without hearing arguments for why Liljeberg's reasons ought to be made public.