

Local news

Fake ID plea may bring 45 years

By Kimball Perry
Post staff reporter

A Roselawn man faces 45 years in prison after he admitted he took money to process fake IDs. And his admission may save his mother, also accused in the scheme, from going to jail.

Ernie Ward Jr., 20, pleaded guilty Wednesday to nine counts of bribery in what the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles said is the largest fake ID ring in its history. His mother, 44-year-old Diane Ward, also is charged with nine counts of bribery.

But immediately after Ward pleaded guilty and had his sentencing set for March 17, his mother's attorney told assistant Hamilton County prosecutor Gwen Bender that she was re-

jecting a previously arranged plea agreement.

Ms. Bender had agreed to lower the nine counts of bribery against Ms. Ward, who also faces 45 years in prison, to misdemeanors that would have cut her maximum sentence by 80 percent. Instead, Ms. Ward now wants to go to trial — where her son could take the fall for her by testifying she knew nothing about the scheme.

The Wards were arrested after Cincinnati police stopped a car full of teens near Ault Park last year and discovered they had multiple identification cards. An investigation led to the Wards being accused of taking \$25 to \$100 per ID to provide fake cards to 137 people.

Charges end, for now

By Kimball Perry
Post staff reporter

Hamilton County prosecutors dropped charges Thursday against a woman accused of helping her son provide 137 fake IDs, but they could indict her again.

Assistant prosecutor Gwen Bender agreed to drop nine bribery charges against Diane Ward, a day after Ms. Ward's son, Ernie Ward Jr., pleaded guilty to the same charges and faces 45 years in prison.

Ms. Bender, though, suggested to Hamilton County Com-

mon Pleas Court Judge Art Ney that other charges could be filed against Ms. Ward, 44.

The Wards were indicted last fall after the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles said it had cracked the largest fake ID ring in its history with the Wards' arrest. They were accused of taking between \$25 and \$100 from 137 persons in four states, many of them underage, for fake IDs.

After Ernie Ward pleaded guilty Wednesday, Ms. Ward rejected a plea bargain that would have resulted in her pleading guilty to misdemeanor charges of falsification.