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Crisis: Failure to pay lawyers amounts to obstruction of justice, he says. Meanwhile, a criminal probe widens.

January 14, 1995 | RENE LYNCH and MARK PLATTE and MATT LAIT, TIMES STAFF WRITERS

SANTA ANA — An Orange County judge threatened Friday to hold the Board of Supervisors and other top officials in contempt and said their failure to pay private lawyers assigned to major murder cases amounts to obstruction of justice.

Superior Court Judge David O. Carter lashed out after defense attorneys complained that investigators and expert witnesses also have not been paid for upcoming trials, including the cases against a Dana Point computer consultant accused of poisoning his wife and an ex-convict charged with sexually assaulting and repeatedly stabbing a young woman outside a nightclub in Orange.

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Carter said the courts have been "exceedingly gracious" by giving the county time to resolve its financial issues in the wake of the Dec. 6 bankruptcy.

"It seems to me now we can't delay too much longer," the judge said during a court hearing for Edward Patrick Morgan, who is awaiting trial in the nightclub murder.

Supervisors were hit with more bad news as the District Attorney's criminal investigation into the county's financial collapse moved into their own offices. Three aides to Supervisors Gaddi H. Vasquez, Roger R. Stanton and William G. Steiner have been summoned to appear before the Orange County Grand Jury.

A fourth aide--Santa Ana councilman Robert Richardson--confirmed Friday that he was questioned by two investigators this week about his dealings with the county treasurer's office. Richardson, who works for Stanton, declined to elaborate.

*

The district attorney's inquiry apparently is focusing on whether any brokerage firms received county business in exchange for campaign contributions or gifts to county officials, sources close to the investigation said. Investigators want to find out what the aides knew about the county's investment fund before it collapsed last month and how frequently they dealt with then-Treasurer-Tax Collector Robert L. Citron.

County sources said one of the aides, Dean Olsen, who works for Steiner, was approached by investigators Wednesday, but attorneys for the Bryan Cave law firm, which is representing members of the Board of Supervisors, advised county aides not to talk without a lawyer present. The other two aides subpoenaed were Kathleen Freed, who also works for Stanton, and Tiffany Kretzschmar, who works for Vasquez.

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On Thursday, authorities were back with subpoenas compelling the three aides to appear before the grand jury next week.

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