

U.S. says Hale knew about shooting spree - Prosecutors plan to show links to rampage gunman

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Federal prosecutors have evidence they say demonstrates that white supremacist Matthew Hale likely knew in advance that a member of his World Church of the Creator planned to go on a shooting rampage targeting minorities, according to a government motion filed this week.

The filing seeks permission from U.S. District Judge James T. Moody to admit evidence of Hale's close relationship with follower Benjamin Smith in Hale's trial next month on charges he solicited the murder of U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow. Hale also is charged with three counts of obstructing justice.

Prosecutors say the evidence outlined in the motion they filed late Tuesday corroborates Hale's intent to seek the murder of Lefkow, whom they say he labeled a "probable Jew."

Smith killed two people and injured nine others in Illinois and Indiana in July 1999 before taking his own life.

Hale has been in jail since January on charges he solicited Lefkow's murder after she enforced a court order that Hale's group change its name after losing a copyright infringement lawsuit. The group is now known as the Creativity Movement.

According to the motion, Hale, of East Peoria, was close to Smith and was seen with him days before the shooting spree. Many of Smith's personal belongings were found in Hale's storage locker, the filing indicates, and Hale was seen with Smith at the locker days before the shootings.

Phone records establish "significant" contact between Hale's and Smith's phones in the days leading up to the shootings, the filing states. It also alleges that Hale entrusted Smith with a World Church check that Hale had signed but left blank as to the amount and the payee, "suggesting (Hale) had great trust in Smith."

Hale also received a certified letter from Smith stating that he was breaking with the church because, "I am unable and unwilling to follow a legal revolution of values." That letter is significant, the motion argues, because Hale has testified that members of the church normally are removed from membership after not paying dues for several months, thus suggesting that the "extraordinary" letter was "purposefully orchestrated."

"The proffered evidence shows that the defendant had an extremely close relationship with Smith, that he likely knew of Smith's plans in advance, and he did nothing to prevent Smith from carrying out with his plans," the motion states.

Hale's attorney, Thomas Durkin, called the filing "ridiculous" and the government's case "incredibly weak."

"It just shows how desperate they are to smear Hale," he said.

In August, authorities disclosed in the charges that the grand jury has been investigating allegations that Hale "ordered or encouraged" Smith's shooting rampage. In public statements after the shootings, Hale expressed compassion for Smith.

Randall Samborn, spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago, said prosecutors would not comment beyond what is in the filing itself.

The government also is seeking to submit evidence showing that Hale coached World Church members on how to testify falsely in judicial proceedings. The taped conversations, prosecutors say, reflect a pattern that he carried on when he allegedly instructed his father to lie to a federal grand jury--which constitutes one of his obstruction of justice charges. His father's testimony about Hale's reaction during Smith's killing spree is significant because he was the only person with Hale during that time, the motion states.

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