

Maine Man Charged With Hate Crime in Black Church Arson

A Maine man accused of setting fire to a Massachusetts church with a predominantly Black congregation been charged with hate crime offenses, federal prosecutors said Thursday.

Dushko Vulchev is charged in federal court with four counts of damage to religious property involving fire and one count of use of fire to commit a federal felony stemming from the Dec. 28, 2020 blaze at the Martin Luther King Jr. Presbyterian Church in Springfield.

Investigators found messages on his electronic devices revealing Vulchev's hatred of Black people, prosecutors said.

The 44-year-old Houlton, Maine man had already been charged in state court for a series of earlier smaller fires at the church. He pleaded not guilty in January to six charges, including attempted arson, and remains in state custody. His lawyer in that case called it a case of mistaken identity.

A lawyer representing Vulchev in the federal case said Thursday he couldn't comment.

Vulchev, a naturalized citizen from Bulgaria, was charged in 2016 with kidnapping and domestic assault in Maine, where he allegedly held a woman captive. The kidnapping charge was dismissed but he was sentenced to 258 days in jail for assault and other charges. He also pleaded guilty in federal court to threatening Bulgarian officials.

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