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Michael Amatullo sentenced to nearly three years in prison for screaming racial slurs and threatening to harm two children

Today, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill announced that 61-year-old Michael Amatullo received a prison sentence of nearly three years for screaming racial slurs and threatening to harm two children with a knife.

Amatullo was found guilty on July 17, 2019 of two counts of intimidation in the second degree, two counts of menacing and one count of unlawful use of a weapon.

“Michael Amatullo, who is a white male, had the choice to use whatever words he wanted to use. Instead, he used the N-word over and over again against two African American children. This vile attack was motivated based on Mr. Amatullo’s perception of the race and skin color of the victims,” said Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney BJ Park, who prosecuted this case. “When he was put in the back seat of the police car, he continued this explosive and harmful conduct by using racial slurs all the way down to the police station.”

One of the victims in this case, a seven year old child, told the court during today’s sentencing hearing that he felt “sad” and that he “didn’t like it” when Amatullo used the hate speech.

This investigation started on December 18, 2018 when Portland Police responded to the 9200-block of Southeast Division Street on reports of a disturbance. Upon arrival, law enforcement contacted two victims, a seven year old child and his 15 year old brother, both of whom are African American, and learned that their neighbor had used racist language towards both and threatened them with a knife.

During the three-day trial, the state presented evidence to show that the incident started when the seven year old child walked from his apartment to throw out some trash when Amatullo started yelling and screaming at the child. Amatullo repeatedly used racist language towards the child.

The child’s older brother saw the disturbance and stepped in between the two. Amatullo then started screaming racist expletives towards the 15 year old victim. Fearing for his safety, and the safety of his brother, the 15 year old physically threatened Amatullo. As the shouting continued, Amatullo went inside his apartment, grabbed a kitchen knife, went back to his doorway, and held the knife up at shoulder level as if he was going to stab the 15 year old. Amatullo was about six feet from both victims while armed with the knife.

Both victims ran away and hid under the stairwell of a neighboring apartment. Two separate 9-1-1 calls were placed, one by the 15 year old young man, the other by Amatullo. The jury heard the 9-1-1 calls, which included Amatullo using racist language to describe the victims.

Dr. Shirley A. Jackson, a professor and the chair of Black Studies at Portland State University, said during Thursday’s sentencing hearing the hate speech used in this case, in particular the N-word, is “harmful” and has been used to describe African Americans as “someone less than human.”

“It is a word that carries with it a lot of anger and animus,” Dr. Jackson said in court.

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The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office was an active participant of the Oregon Attorney General's Hate Crimes Task Force and helped draft the language that was in Senate Bill 577. The new law, which went into effect on July 15, 2019, renamed the crime of "intimidation" to "bias crime," added gender identity to the list of protected categories and removed the requirement that two or more people commit the crime in order to make it a felony in certain circumstances.

All potential bias crime cases, whether they are a felony or misdemeanor, are reviewed by the Violent Crimes Unit within the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office. If a misdemeanor bias crimes case is issued, the felony-level attorney will retain the case.

This case was issued and prosecuted before July 25, 2019, which is when Oregon's new bias crime law went into effect. As a result, the crime Amatullo was convicted of should be referred to as "intimidation in the second degree."

Amatullo was acquitted of one count of unlawful use of a weapon.

The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office recognizes the victims in this case for coming forward to report this crime and the Portland Police Bureau for their dedicated efforts investigating this case.

We would also like to acknowledge Victim Advocate Chanel Thomas for the assistance and advocacy she provided to the victims and their family during the criminal justice process.

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