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Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Massachusetts Man Convicted of Placing Firebomb at Entrance of Jewish Nursing Home

Defendant Previously Convicted of Lying to Federal Agent

A Massachusetts man was convicted by a federal jury yesterday in connection with placing a lit firebomb at the entrance of a Longmeadow senior health care facility in April 2020.

John Rathbun, 37, of East Longmeadow, was convicted following a week-long trial of one count of attempting to transport or receive explosive devices in interstate or foreign commerce with the knowledge or intent that the device will be used to kill, injure or intimidate any individual or unlawfully to damage or destroy any building, vehicle and one count of attempting to maliciously damage or destroy, by means of fire or an explosive, any building, vehicle or other real or personal property used in interstate or foreign commerce. U.S. District Court Judge Mark G. Mastroianni scheduled sentencing for Nov. 12.

“Mr. Rathburn’s dangerous and cruel acts harmed not only the elderly residents of this Jewish assisted living facility, but also the entire community,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “I thank the jury, prosecutors and investigators for their efforts to ensure the defendant was held accountable for his actions.”

“The jury has spoken: Mr. Rathbun is guilty of lighting a firebomb right at the entrance to a Jewish assisted-living facility – a cruel and senseless crime,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell for the District of Massachusetts. “Thanks to the jury’s verdict and the good work of prosecutors and investigators, the man who targeted vulnerable members of our community will not be a threat to public safety anytime soon.”

“The danger posed by John Rathbun in this case was very real. By trying to ignite a firebomb outside a Jewish assisted-living facility, he put the lives of innocent people at risk,” said Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Boston FBI Field Office. “Through the diligent efforts of our Western Massachusetts Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the jury’s hard work, the community is much safer now.”

On Nov. 23, 2020, a federal jury convicted Rathbun of making false statements to a federal agent, but deadlocked on the arson counts, requiring a re-trial.

On the morning of April 2, 2020, Rathbun assembled, placed and lit a homemade incendiary device outside the entrance of Jewish Geriatric Services Lifecare, Inc., an assisted living facility in Longmeadow. The device consisted of a five-gallon Scepter fuel canister filled with gasoline and a Christian religious pamphlet as the wick. Forensic analysis identified Rathbun’s DNA on the canister and pamphlet.

On April 15, 2020, Rathbun falsely stated to a federal agent that he was at home on April 2, he was not familiar with the location on Converse Street where the device was placed and he had not possessed or even seen the fuel canister.

The charge of attempting to transport or receive explosive devices in interstate or foreign commerce with the knowledge or intent that the device will be used to kill, injure, or intimidate any individual or unlawfully to damage or destroy any building, vehicle, or other real or personal property provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of attempting to maliciously damage or destroy, by means of fire or an explosive, any building, vehicle or other real or personal property used in interstate or foreign commerce provides for a mandatory minimum sentence of five years and up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The false statement charge provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Sentences are imposed based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting U.S. Attorney Mendell and FBI Boston SAC Bonavolonta made the announcement. The investigation was led by the FBI's Western Massachusetts Joint Terrorism Task Force with valuable assistance also provided by the Longmeadow and East Longmeadow Police Departments and the Massachusetts State Police. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Neil Desroches and Steven H. Breslow of Mendell's Springfield Branch Office prosecuted the case. The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division also assisted with the prosecution.

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Civil Rights Division

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