

Man Gets 18 Months Behind Bars For Threatening To Shoot Judge

MIDDLETOWN — Saying threats of violence are "punishable" speech not protected by the First Amendment, a Superior Court judge Tuesday sentenced a Cromwell man to 18 months in prison for threatening to shoot a family court judge who was overseeing his contentious divorce case.

Edward "Ted" Taupier, 50, was convicted in October of first-degree threatening, two counts of disorderly conduct and second-degree breach of peace, according to a verdict and memorandum of decision by Superior Court Judge David P. Gold. Taupier went to trial in April on charges that he threatened to shoot Hartford Superior Court Judge Elizabeth Bozzuto. The threats were made in an email sent to several people but not to Bozzuto.

On Tuesday, Gold told Taupier that he was not being sentenced for his criticism of the judicial system. Distasteful, crude and obnoxious words and sharp criticism are protected by the Constitution, he said. But a "true threat that carries fear and disrupts a person's sense of safety and security" is criminal and crosses the line, he said.

"To allow criminal speech to go unpunished ... will not serve to strengthen the First Amendment," Gold said.

At trial, Taupier's lawyer, Rachel Baird, argued that no evidence linked Taupier to the email. If there was an email, Baird said, it was not an intentional threat but a message meant to vent his frustration with the family courts and police officials who, she said, made errors in the investigation.

Those who object to the philosophy of "go along to get along" with the judicial system, Baird said, have a right to question and make complaints about the system without repercussions.

"It takes somebody like Mr. Taupier to bring this out so we have a dialogue today," Baird said. She urged Gold to keep Taupier out of prison and under home confinement where he has been since September 2014. Prison would be difficult for his young children and add to the problems he has had since his divorce. Taupier told the judge his family life and career are ruined.

"I'm OK with what I have to face," Taupier said. "It's my children that are suffering."

Court records say the email described where Bozzuto lives "with her boys and nanny," saying that there is "245 yds between her master bedroom and a cemetery that provides cover and concealment." The email went on to say "They can steal my kids from my cold dead bleeding cordite filled fists ... as my 60 round mag falls to the floor and im dying as I change out to the next 30 rd."

Bozzuto spoke briefly at Tuesday's hearing, telling the judge that the email also called court officials "evil, self-appointed devils" and that it warned that when court officials "figure out that they are not protected from bad things and their families are taken from them ... then the system will change."

Bozzuto told Gold that she "never imagined" that she would ever have to address the court as a victim in a criminal case, "relative to my job, no less," she said.

She acknowledged a code of conduct judges follow that limits what they can say about cases they hear, but Bozzuto said she had a constitutional right to be heard as a victim. She told Gold she would be satisfied with whatever sentence he imposed on Taupier and requested that he be ordered to have no contact "for as long as may be permissible legally" with her or her family.

"As judges, we do not waive our right to be protected by the law," she said. "It is one thing for groups or individuals to pursue reform or change through the democratic or legislative process ... It is quite another thing to attempt to hold justice hostage and extort change by way of intimidation, threats and violence."

In his verdict, Gold concluded that the evidence at Taupier's trial proved "beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant communicated his email on Aug. 22, 2014 in reckless disregard of the risk of terrorizing another person." Taupier was aware the email "would be seen as threatening and create a risk of terror, and yet consciously chose to disregard his awareness" by sending it out, Gold wrote.

Bozzuto said she still waits for the day when she can be at home without worrying that Taupier is "lying in wait on the hill at the back of" her house armed with a long-range firearm with "non-armor piercing ball ammunition that he calculated would maintain sufficient force and velocity to kill me."

Police arrested Taupier on Aug. 29, 2014, the day after one of the email recipients forwarded a portion of the email to a lawyer, who notified judicial authorities. The email

containing the threat, sent to a group of people unhappy with the family court system, included information about Bozzuto's home, the distance to her master bedroom from a nearby cemetery, and ammunition that could be used to shoot her, according to trial testimony.

Gold said the email "with frightening specificity correctly described" Bozzuto's home and that Taupier said he was "prepared to risk imprisonment in order to commit the threatened assault." Gold said evidence at trial showed Taupier "harbored strong sentiments against" Bozzuto and made those feelings known in emails, in Facebook postings and in a radio interview. Taupier had four firearms that were capable of firing a shot from a long distance, Gold wrote in the verdict.

A half-dozen family members and friends of Taupier asked the judge for leniency Tuesday, describing Taupier as a loving father, intelligent, hardworking and an active volunteer in the community.

Prosecutor Brenda Hans argued for a strict sentence, saying that Taupier has no remorse. Taupier could have faced up to six years in prison but was given a sentence of five years in prison suspended after 18 months served and five years of probation.

Defense lawyer Norman A. Pattis said Tuesday that Taupier will appeal the conviction.