

**US News MSNBC**

## **Accused Amish beard-cutter willing to use electricity if freed pre-trial**

By msnbc.com staff and news services



Amy Sancetta / AP

Outside his home in Bergholz, Ohio, stands Sam Mullet, Sr., on Oct. 10, 2011. He is one of 12 people facing federal charges for religious-motivated crimes, authorities say. (AP Photo/Amy Sancetta)

The alleged leader of a splinter Amish group charged with federal religious-motivated crimes in a slew of beard- and hair-cutting attacks in his Ohio community would use electricity to facilitate an electronic monitoring device if a judge agreed to his pre-trial release, court documents show.

Sam Mullet Sr., 66, bishop of the Amish community in Bergholz, Ohio, was indicted -- along with 11 others -- by a federal grand jury in late December for their alleged role in five separate assaults that occurred between September and November, according to the [Department of Justice](#).

Mullet was being held pending the start of the March 19 trial, according to [The Plain Dealer](#). His lawyer, Edward G. Bryan, argued in a filing on Wednesday to U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio that Mullet should be freed because he would agree to use an electronic monitoring device and he did not pose a threat to his community.

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The court has "stated that there were no 'conditions or combinations of conditions' that could warrant Mr. Mullet's release pending trial. This court seemed to make this finding, at least in part, on the fact that one of the common conditions of pretrial release imposed by courts, electronic monitoring, would not be available to Mr. Mullet because his home is not equipt (sic) with electricity because of his Amish beliefs," Bryan wrote. " ... Mr. Mullet informs that he is not opposed to allowing electricity to be installed at his residence to accommodate an electronic monitoring device. It is not part of the Amish belief system that electricity is per se evil."

The Amish are known for simple living and most shun the conveniences of modern technology, such as electricity.

Bryan noted that Mullet is married, has 16 children -- most of whom live in the community -- and scores of grandchildren, and did not post a threat to his neighbors and was not a flight risk.

"Pretrial detention creates a much greater harm to Mr. Mullet and his family than electrical service being provided to his home. Mr. Mullet's release on bond will allow him to be with his family and provide assistance to others in running the affairs of the home," Bryan wrote. "This is especially true for Mr. Mullet because in light of his belief system, he and his family live without many modern conveniences, such as a centralized heating system to keep his home warm in the winter. Instead, Mr. Mullet's home is kept warm in the winter by a series of wood burning stoves that require constant replenishing of fire wood."

The Justice Department stood by Mullet's detention.

"We are opposed to the motion," Mike Tobin, a department spokesman, told msnbc.com. "Essentially we're opposed to it for the same reason we've been opposed to the release of Mullet and the six co-defendants from day one, which is that they pose a threat to the community, so it's really as simple as that."

According to the seven-count federal indictment, religious disputes with other members of the Ohio Amish community led the defendants to plan and carry out a series of attacks on their perceived enemies. "The assaults all entailed using scissors and battery-powered clippers to forcibly cut or shave the beard hair of the male victims and the head hair of the female victims," according to the Justice Department statement.

The charges against Mullet and 11 others include conspiracy to violate the Matthew Shepard-James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which prohibits anyone person from willfully causing bodily injury to any person, or attempting to do so by use of a dangerous weapon, because of the actual or perceived religion of that person -- and carries a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Mullet has said he hadn't ordered the hair-cutting -- which is viewed as very offensive in Amish culture -- but didn't stop others, according to [The Associated Press](#). Six of Mullet's co-defendants have also been ordered jailed pending trial.

*The Associated Press and msnbc.com's Miranda Leitsinger contributed to this story.*