

U.S. Dept. of Justice: Wisconsin man pleads guilty to making racially charged threats toward Black residents

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United States Attorney Gregory J. Haanstad of the Eastern District of Wisconsin joined Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in announcing that on March 23, 2023, a Wisconsin man pleaded guilty to one felony count and one misdemeanor count of intimidating and interfering with Black residents because of their race and because they were exercising their right to fair housing.

According to court documents, William McDonald, 45, of West Allis, Wisconsin, admitted that in March 2021, he vandalized a Black woman's vehicle parked outside her apartment by slashing her tires and smashing her windshield. McDonald then left a note on her car, filled with racial slurs, threatening to slash her throat, and demanding she move out of West Allis. A week later, McDonald slashed two of her car tires and left another note filled with racial slurs and giving her an ultimatum – move out of the neighborhood or suffer violence. In April 2022, a Black woman and her two minor children moved into McDonald's apartment complex. Shortly after they moved in, McDonald vandalized her front door with racial graffiti and left her a note, calling her family a racial slur and demanding she get out of the building.

"No one should feel unsafe in their home or be subjected to harmful and derogatory threats because of the color of their skin," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department will continue to protect the housing rights of all individuals and vigorously prosecute those who use racially-charged threats to drive people from their homes."

“The conduct at issue in this case strikes at the very core of the civil rights guaranteed to every American citizen under federal law,” stated U.S. Attorney Haanstad. “I commend the courage of those targeted by Mr. McDonald for coming forward. The U.S. Attorney’s Office remains committed to working with all our federal, state, and local partners to hold individuals who violate the civil rights of others fully accountable under federal law.”

McDonald faces a maximum sentence of up to 11 years in prison. A sentencing date has been set for June 29, 2023.

This case was investigated by the FBI Milwaukee Field Division and the West Allis Police Department.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Christopher Ladwig and Philip Kovoor for the Eastern District of Wisconsin and Trial Attorney Nikhil Ramnaney of the Civil Rights Division’s Criminal Section are prosecuting the case.