

## Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

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### **Missouri Woman Pleads Guilty for Role in the Vandalism and Arson of a Mobile Home**

Teresa Witthar, 43, of Independence, Mo., pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Kansas City to federal hate crime charges in connection with the vandalism and arson of a bi-racial man's mobile home in 2006.

Witthar was indicted by a federal grand jury in August 2011, on one count of conspiracy, one count of violating the Fair Housing Act, one count of using fire to commit a felony, two counts of obstruction of justice and two counts of making false statements for her role in the vandalism and fire of Nathaniel Reed's mobile home. Witthar entered a guilty plea to one count of conspiracy, one count of violating the Fair Housing Act and one count of obstruction of justice.

According to the indictment, in the summer of 2006, Witthar, Charles Wilhelm and David Martin conspired to intimidate and scare Nathaniel Reed, a bi-racial man, into moving out of the Highland Manor Mobile Home Park in Independence, Mo., in part because of his race. On or about June 6, 2006, Witthar, along with Wilhelm and Martin, entered Reed's mobile home, without his permission, and vandalized it by writing at least fifteen racially derogatory slurs on the walls of his trailer. Two days later, Witthar drove Martin and Wilhelm to a neighbourhood behind Reed's mobile home so that they could set fire to Reed's trailer without being detected. Witthar waited in her vehicle while they set the fire and then provided them a ride back to the Highland Manor Mobile Home Park.

In the spring of 2011, Witthar unsuccessfully attempted to persuade another individual to testify falsely in front of a grand jury about her role in the vandalism and fire.

"Every American has the right to enjoy their home free from racially-motivated violence, threats and intimidation," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice. "The Civil Rights Division will aggressively prosecute those who violate this right."

"When threats and vandalism failed to drive their victim out of the neighborhood, these conspirators escalated their racially-motivated campaign by burning down his home," said Beth Phillips, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri. "The Constitution protects each of us from racially-motivated intimidation, and this defendant will be held accountable for violating Mr. Reed's civil rights."

“Today’s guilty plea exemplifies the FBI’s continued long term commitment to aggressively pursue justice for those who are victims of racially motivated crimes,” said Brian A. Truchon, Special Agent in Charge of the Kansas City Division of the FBI.

The guilty plea was the result of a cooperative effort between the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Missouri, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, and the Kansas City Division of the FBI. The case is being prosecuted by First Assistant U.S. Attorney David Ketchmark for the Western District of Missouri and Trial Attorney Sheldon L. Beer of the Civil Rights Division’s Criminal Section.