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CRIME & COURTS

Man convicted in rape of Burlington baker asks judge for new trial after juror's Facebook post



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A Burlington woman told the Des Moines Register in November that reliving her rape in the courtroom, in front of friends, strangers and her assailant, was its own kind of assault.

Now she might have to testify again.

Justina Rucinski sat in the Des Moines County Courthouse the week before Thanksgiving and recalled how a stranger gained access to her by pretending to purchase an order from her in-home bakery.

Once inside her home, the man held a gun to her head, tied her wrists with zip ties and raped her, she said. Then he ordered her to shower in front of him before forcing her to withdraw \$40 from an ATM for him before dropping him off.

The jury returned the verdict on the afternoon of Nov. 25, convicting 38-year-old Steven Mauck of second-degree sexual abuse.

Mauck, who faces a minimum of 17-and-a-half years in prison for his conviction, wrote a letter to District Judge Mary Ann Brown last month requesting a new trial because of a juror's Facebook post.

More: 'I was in hell': After a stranger violently raped a home baker, she's dedicating her life to making sure no other woman feels that pain

In the early hours of Nov, 22, a juror made a public post on Facebook which read, "Hoping and PRAYING one of the LONGEST weeks of my life concludes today. Pray for 12 people for reason and discernment," court records show.

"Although brief in its nature, (the juror's) post is a major cause for concern," Mauck wrote in a letter to the judge. "Because the post is of a public nature on a social media site, it is no different than if (the juror) had given a quote to a member of the mainstream media."

Mauck claimed in court records that the juror who made the post is also a member of a closed Facebook group that posted articles about the case during trial.

According to Iowa Criminal Jury Instructions, "(jurors) may not communicate about this case before reaching your verdict." This restriction includes cell phone, email and social media use.

"There exists no room for a gray area here, especially where someone's liberty is at stake," Mauck continued.

The hearing to address Mauck's request for a new trial is set for Jan. 21. He will be sentenced that day if the judge doesn't grant his motion for a new trial.

Mauck's public defender, James Carter, declined to comment. The Des Moines County Attorney could not immediately be reached for comment.

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