

Judge releases New Bedford arson suspect despite state's request he be held as a danger

The man arrested for arson Feb. 28 at 330 North Front St. was released on a GPS bracelet monitoring despite the state's request that he be held without bail as a danger.

New Bedford Police arrested Xavier Betancourt-Echev, 25, of 330 North Front St. Apt. 3S, New Bedford, on arson charges in connection with the fire in the five-family home, which displaced 13 residents.

Live coverage:

At Betancourt-Echev's arraignment Thursday, the district attorney's office requested that Betancourt-Echev be held without bail as a danger. Judge Robert Ovoian denied the request and set Betancourt-Echev free with the requirement that he wear a GPS bracelet, pay \$500 in bail and stay away from the house.

The district attorney's office filed a motion to reconsider the decision. In the filing the office cited six facts:

The defendant admitted to setting the fire.

The American Red Cross was called in to help the 13 displaced tenants.

Numerous firefighters and equipment had to be sent to the scene to battle the fire .

The defendant took premeditated action, filling a container

with gasoline and setting fire to the hallway, which would be an exit route for some of the residents. This placed the residents and responding firefighters in danger.

The defendant is alleged to suffer from mental illness, which, in connection with his action of setting fire to a dwelling with multiple residents, shows he is a "significant threat to society."

Judge Ovoian was not present in court Friday so he could not reconsider his actions. Betancourt-Echev remains free, with GPS monitoring.

His next court date is April 10 for a probable cause hearing.