Prosecutors submit evidence that Kenosha, Wisconsin shooter Rittenhouse has ties to fascist Proud Boys

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Prosecutors in Kenosha, Wisconsin, filed a motion on Thursday that asked Judge Bruce Schroeder to allow them to introduce evidence showing that the vigilante shooter Kyle Rittenhouse is associated with the fascist Proud Boys organization.

Kenosha County Assistant District Attorneys Thomas Binger and Jason Zapf filed their "other acts" motion in the prosecution of Rittenhouse, who has been charged with killing two men and injuring a third during protests against police violence on August 25, 2020.

The charges—including homicide and attempted homicide—are based on interviews with eyewitnesses who saw Rittenhouse brandishing an AR15-style assault rifle during the protests and firing it recklessly when he was confronted by protesters. The shooter, who was 17 years old at the time, traveled to Kenosha from Antioch, Illinois, to participate with a group of armed volunteers who claimed they were "defending property" during the demonstrations.

The prosecutor's motion in Kenosha County Circuit Court states, "Much like members of the Proud Boys take pride in violence, the defendant is evidently proud that he killed two people and seriously wounded a third. He has posed for selfies as if he is a celebrity. His family has sold merchandise with his image on it that celebrates his acts of violence." The motion argues, "The fact that he has since celebrated his notoriety strongly suggests that he set out to achieve the goal of becoming famous."

In establishing the connection between Rittenhouse and the Proud Boys, the prosecution is seeking to establish the motive for the brutal close-range killing of Anthony Huber, 26, and Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and the serious wounding of Gaige Grosskreutz, 26, on the night in question.

The motion explains that since the arraignment of Rittenhouse, the state has learned "that the people with the defendant at the bar on January 5, 2021 include the leader of the Wisconsin 'Proud Boys' organization and several of its highest-ranking members" and that he posed for photographs with the men. "Obviously, the defendant shares their beliefs and has, in fact, been named an honorary member of the organization," the motion states.

The prosecutors describe the Proud Boys as a "violently racist organization whose members take pride in assaulting members of racial minorities, particularly Black Lives Matter protesters."

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) characterizes the Proud Boys as self-described "Western chauvinists" with leaders who regularly spout white nationalist memes and maintain affiliations with other right-wing extremist groups. The profile on the SPLC website says, "The Proud Boys stage frequent rallies around the country. Many have descended into violent street riots where members openly brawl with counterprotesters. Indeed, as early as summer 2018, a document circulated by Washington state law enforcement described the group's involvement in a series of violent incidents in Oregon and Washington, as well as its involvement in Unite the Right [rally in Charlottesville, Virginia]."

Immediately following the shooting of the Kenosha protesters, Rittenhouse was hailed by extreme right-wing groups across the US as a "hero" and a campaign was launched in his defense on the grounds that his shooting of protesters was in "self-defense." This effort included a fund-raising campaign led by fascist

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attorney L. Lin Wood and favorable comments by then-President Donald Trump backing the claims that Rittenhouse was defending himself because he "probably would have been killed" by protesters.

Following the shootings, Rittenhouse proceeded on foot with his assault rifle through a line of police vehicles in Kenosha, drove back to his hometown of Antioch and turned himself in to authorities the next morning. He was detained for two months in the local jail until he was extradited to Wisconsin on October 5. During this time, the right-wing campaign supporting the vigilante shooter raised $2 million in his defense.

Two months later, Rittenhouse was arraigned in a virtual hearing and pleaded not guilty to all charges. After posting bail from the support fund, Rittenhouse walked out of jail in Kenosha and went to a bar in Racine County where he met, along with his mother, several leading members of the Proud Boys organization in Wisconsin. Surveillance video and still photos taken at Pudgy's Pub show Rittenhouse posing for photos with the Proud Boys, flashing a white power symbol and loudly singing a song associated with the organization.

A lengthy profile of Rittenhouse published by the *New Yorker* on June 28 said that a former Navy SEAL named Dave Hancock, who had also been an executive director of attorney Wood's #FightBack organization, provided Rittenhouse with personal security following his release on bail. Hancock bought the shooter new clothes and helped to move the Rittenhouse family to a "safe house" near South Bend, Indiana, at the request of another attorney, John Pierce.

The *New Yorker* article says that after his release on bail, Rittenhouse and his mother were driven by Hancock to Pudgy's where he met with "about ten people." The report also says that Pierce sent Rittenhouse's mother a text message before they arrived at the bar which said that he "just got retained by Chandler Pappas," the far-right activist affiliated with Patriot Prayer who had been charged with macing six police officers in Portland. Pappas had also appeared on a platform with Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio. Tarrio has been photographed wearing a T-shirt that says, "Kyle Rittenhouse Did Nothing Wrong!" and the group has hosted rallies at which members and others have chanted, "Good job, Kyle!"

The prosecutors also requested in the motion to have evidence added to the case that Rittenhouse repeatedly punched a teenage girl during an incident on the Kenosha lakefront in July of last year, one month before the shootings. A video of the incident, which has been shared on social media, shows Rittenhouse attacking the girl during a scuffle with another girl. The motion states, "As this female teenager is pulled away from the defendant due to her ongoing struggle with another female, the defendant chases after her and begins to punch her in the back again."

In concluding their argument for the court to admit the evidence, Binger and Zapf state that Rittenhouse "placed himself in violent situations in which he should have had no involvement. After willingly putting himself in these violent conflicts, the defendant responded to them both by perpetrating further acts of violence."

Rittenhouse's attorneys Mark Richards and Corey Chirafisi filed a response to the prosecution motion stating, "there is no evidence that Rittenhouse ever sought out, actively searched for, or attempted to communicate in any way with the Proud Boys or any other organizations."

Kenosha County Circuit Court Judge Schroeder is scheduled to hear arguments on the motions on August 17 and Rittenhouse's trial is set to begin in November. A previous motion by the prosecution to increase the shooter's bail requirement and issue a warrant to rearrest him because he violated the terms of his original bail was denied by Judge Schroeder on February 11.

Throughout the proceedings, the judge has refused to allow any discussion of the connections between Rittenhouse and his far-right and fascist supporters. In an unprecedented act of solidarizing himself with the shooter and his supporters, Judge Schroeder blocked the prosecution from obtaining the precise whereabouts of Rittenhouse after he was relocated to Indiana, which is a standard procedure in a murder case.

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