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Thursday, September 27, 2007

Mayo threat suspect held

Call to school targeted teacher

By Jean Laquidara Hill TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

HOLDEN— Stephen J. Pope, 45, who allegedly tried to extort \$ 25,000 from a teacher at Dr. Leroy Mayo Elementary School by threatening to injure her if she did not give him money, was ordered held yesterday on \$50,000 cash bail at his arraignment.

The alleged threat caused worry among parents sending children off for their first day at the kindergarten-through-fifth-grade school.

The day before school began, Superintendent of Schools Thomas G. Pandiscio sent a recorded telephone message to the household of every student informing parents of the threat and saying that a police officer would be at the school.

The officer was posted inside the school from the first day of school, Sept. 5, through Sept. 7, when Mr. Pope was arrested in Fort Worth, Texas.

Mr. Pope, whose last known address is New York City, is charged with threatening to commit a crime, bodily injury; disrupting a school assembly and extortion with the threat of injury. He did not enter a plea yesterday. He was arrested on a warrant obtained by the Holden Police Department and the Worcester district attorney's office.

Mr. Pope is facing charges on five warrants in other courts, including violating a restraining order, a 13-year-old default warrant for a charge of possessing a firearm without a Firearms Identification Card, making annoying telephone calls, extortion and violations of probation, Assistant District Attorney David P. Feraco told the court yesterday before bail was set.

Mr. Feraco told the court Mr. Pope



Mr. Pope

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had left a recorded message at the school Aug. 30 threatening to injure a teacher (his sister) if she did not give him \$25,000, and telling the school principal that the teacher should be fired.

Mr. Feraco said Mr. Pope made veiled threats in the recorded message against the children attending the school, saying that he would not want anything to happen to them. He also said that if the teacher and principal did as he asked, "he would not have to travel up here to address it," Mr. Feraco said.

Police have declined to identify the teacher who was threatened, except to say she is Mr. Pope's sister.

Mr. Feraco had asked the court to set bail at \$75,000 cash or \$750,000 surety, saying Mr. Pope has a record of defaulting and also has cases pending in Natick, Marlboro and East Brookfield courts.

Judge John J. Curran Jr. said Mr. Pope likely will be held without bail when he appears in Marlboro District Court later this week because of a probation violation from that court.

Quesiyah Ali of Worcester, the lawyer appointed to represent Mr. Pope, told the court the Marlboro weapons charge is old, suggesting it not be considered as a reason for high bail. But Judge Curran said that charge against Mr. Pope is old because "he was in default for 13 years."

Ms. Ali told the court Mr. Pope has an education and has had substance abuse problems in the past.

Mr. Pope spoke politely in court as he answered Judge Curran's questions about income and whether he wanted the court to appoint a lawyer. Mr. Pope told the court he does not have a job, and Judge Curran said he could use a court-appointed lawyer.

The case in Leominster District Court was continued to Oct. 22.



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