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Trial Begins for Minnesota Lawmaker Charged in Alleged Home Break-In

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– Categories: Crime



State Senator Nicole Mitchell is set to stand trial this week on felony burglary charges, with jury selection kicking off Monday at the Becker County Courthouse in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. The Democrat from Woodbury is accused of unlawfully entering her stepmother’s home in April 2024, in a case that combines personal loss, family tension, and political pressure.

The trial was originally scheduled to begin last month but was postponed following the shocking shooting deaths of former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her

husband Mark, and the wounding of State Senator John Hoffman and his wife. Mitchell's name, according to her attorney, was reportedly on the shooter's "hit list," which prompted security concerns and pushed back court proceedings.

Defense attorney Dane DeKrey told MPR News that the heart of the trial is about understanding the motive. "Our strategy is to explain to the jury why she entered that home that night," DeKrey said. "Was it a crime of intent, or was it a desperate act driven by grief and family conflict?"

Mitchell, a first-term lawmaker and former Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) meteorologist, faces two felony counts after allegedly breaking into the home of Carol Mitchell, her late father's wife. According to investigators, the senator drove overnight from her home near St. Paul to Detroit Lakes and entered the house in the early morning hours, reportedly in search of belongings tied to her father, including his ashes.

DeKrey confirmed that Mitchell is likely to testify on her behalf. He also said there were plea discussions with the Becker County Attorney's Office, but the two sides couldn't reach common ground. "There was never an offer that both parties could live with," he explained.

The defense has emphasized that this case should not be politicized. "We hope Senator Mitchell is judged as Nicole Mitchell, a private citizen from Woodbury, not as a state senator," DeKrey added. "If the jury sees her that way, we believe she'll get a fair trial."

Family Tensions

Rod Mitchell, who passed away in 2023 at age 72, left his entire estate to Carol Mitchell, who is now 75. At 4:45 am on April 22, Carol dialed 911 to report an intruder in her home. Officers who responded found Senator Mitchell in the basement. She allegedly said, "Carol, it's Nicole. I was just trying to get a couple of my dad's things because you wouldn't talk to me anymore."

Mitchell has since claimed her actions were also driven by concern for a family member suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Her legal team attempted to introduce medical records into evidence to support this explanation, but Judge Michael Fritz denied the motion, limiting what the defense can present.

Legal expert and former federal prosecutor Mark Osler says the case stands out. “This isn’t your usual political scandal. It’s not corruption. It’s a family dispute with criminal charges layered on top,” said Osler, who now teaches law at the University of St. Thomas.

He also noted that the family dynamic could complicate testimony. “You have people with mixed emotions and divided loyalties. That makes presenting clear-cut evidence harder for both sides.”

Despite the delay, Osler believes it won’t significantly affect the outcome. “It’s only a few weeks, and both sides have had enough time to prepare,” he said. But he warned that the recent political violence might influence jurors. “That’s a valid concern, and something the court will be looking out for during selection.”

The trial is expected to last more than a week. Local law enforcement has coordinated with the court to ensure safety during proceedings.