

Members of fringe Amish group request word 'cult' be banned from hate-crime trial

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c. 2012 Religion News Service CLEVELAND (RNS) Members of a fringe Amish group charged with committing hate crimes against fellow Amish have requested that certain words, including "cult," "splinter" and "rogue," be banned from their upcoming trial in U.S. District Court, according to court documents filed Monday (Aug. 13).

They also requested that any Amish called to testify "affirm the truthfulness" of their testimony rather than swear an oath because swearing an oath "would offend the witness' religious outlook."

Samuel Mullet, 66, of Jefferson County, Ohio, and 15 of his male and female followers are charged with hate crimes and cover-ups. Prosecutors accuse them of forcibly cutting the beards and hair of fellow Amish members. The attacks were designed to settle scores with people with whom Mullet and his followers had disputes, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors accused Mullet of orchestrating the attacks. The trial is scheduled for Aug. 27.

Seven Amish men had their heads and beards shaved during attacks that began last September. Hair length and beards worn by Amish men have religious significance, and to have them cut is considered degrading.

Eight-inch horse mane shears, photographs from a disposable camera and hair collected from a home are among items on the government's exhibit list.

Federal authorities say the attacks were motivated by revenge after a group of Amish bishops refused to accept Mullet's excommunication of eight families who had

left his community because they disagreed with his authoritarian leadership.

According to the trial brief filed Monday by prosecutors, Mullet forced women to have sex with him so they could learn to please their husbands better.

Community members would sleep for days at a time in filthy chicken coops and were supposed to obey not only his interpretation of the Bible but also all of his orders and directives. Mullet is also accused of allowing "the community to engage in practices of self-deprivation and corporal punishment" to prove their loyalty to him.

The defendants also requested in motions filed Monday that mention of sexual conduct, self-deprivation and corporal punishment allegations be prohibited during the trial.