

ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTORS OFFICE PRESS RELEASE



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Subject: Warrant Issued for Man Charged with Torching Mayoral Candidate's Campaign Bus *First Use of New Law Passed Last Year By Legislature*
Date: April 01, 2014
Category: Arson, Burglary
Defendant(s): Michael Benkowski

Acting Essex County Prosecutor Carolyn A. Murray announced today that an arrest warrant has been issued for Michael Benkowski, 43, of Newark.

Benkowski is wanted for setting the campaign bus of mayoral candidate Ras Baraka on fire on Feb. 16. A warrant has been issued for his arrest charging him with 3rd degree arson, 3rd degree criminal mischief and 3rd degree burglary.

During the early morning hours of Sunday, Feb. 16, the campaign bus parked in Newark at 423 Central Avenue, in front of the Baraka campaign headquarters, was torched and sugar was put in the engine. Through surveillance and other technology investigators with the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Arson Task Force learned a white Chevy Express van was involved in the arson.

On March 7 investigators located the 2007 Chevy Express van. It was pulled over in the vicinity of Morris and Central Avenue in Newark. At that time, the van was driven by Shareef Q. Nash, 35, of South Orange. Nash has not been charged with any crime. The vehicle is registered to Prestige Professional Management, LLC, located in Newark.

It is alleged that Benkowski used the van in connection with the arson. Benkowski is currently at-large.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Major Crimes Task Force tips line at 1-877-847-7432.

The investigation is active and ongoing and additional arrests are possible. Acting Prosecutor Murray commended the legal and investigative team for their excellent work on this case.

These are accusations. All defendants are considered innocent unless and until they either enter a guilty plea or are found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Essex County Prosecutor's Office Newark, NJ