

# The Post and Courier

## Bondsmen's failure to track suspect led to rape, Moncks Corner victim alleges

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[Wade Spees/Staff/File](#) A GPS monitoring ankle bracelet. Buy this photo

When Brandon Bannister strayed from the Moncks Corner home where he was supposed to be on house arrest, the company tracking the electronic bracelet on his ankle should have sent him back to jail, according to a lawsuit filed this week.

The 25-year-old was out on bail for reportedly pulling down his pants and showing his genitals to pedestrians in late 2011.



Bail/bonds

agent Greg Robinson shows a GPS monitoring ankle bracelet, that was cut off its wearer when his bond was revoked, at his North Charleston office last year.

He was allowed to leave his house only to visit his doctor, attorney or church. Robinson Bail Bonding, which issued Bannister the satellite tracker, was supposed to alert the authorities if he went elsewhere.

But in March 2012, he wandered off, broke into a Moncks Corner woman's home and raped her, and the woman partially faults Bannister's bondsmen. Bannister is now in prison.

The woman's lawsuit stated that her pain and grief could have been avoided if the North Charleston company and Wilfred Hamilton, who owns a separate Moncks Corner company that posted the bail, had gotten Bannister locked up after his tracker indicated that he had left home several times.



The Convict:

Brandon Bannister, 25, of Moncks Corner, pleaded guilty in May to raping a woman in Moncks Corner while on satellite monitoring in March 2011.

Their failure to act directly resulted in the assault, the filing alleges, so she is asking for unspecified damages for physical and emotional suffering.

The suit is the latest move toward holding monitoring companies responsible for defendants' new crimes while they're out on bail. A Charleston judge last year issued a moratorium to halt further issuing of the Global Position System devices until authorities could figure out how to solve the "mess."



The Bondsman:

Greg Robinson, who co-owns Robinson Bail Bonding, said judges who permit the release of defendants likely to re-offend should share the blame.

But a ruling against the companies in civil court would be unfair and misdirected, said Greg Robinson, who co-owns Robinson Bail Bonding. The judges who permit the release of defendants likely to re-offend should share the blame, he said.

"They think (a GPS monitor) is going to stop someone who's already nuts from doing something crazy again," Robinson said. "It's not going to stop a murderer from going and doing something

stupid until real life becomes like the movies, and the devices automatically blow up.”

Hamilton declined to discuss the lawsuit and refused to say whether he had hired an attorney.

Solicitor Scarlett Wilson of the Ninth Judicial Circuit, whose office has aggressively sought penalties against bonding companies, said she was not available Wednesday to comment on the issue.

### **‘All over the place’**

The rape victim, who is in her early 20s, was sleeping one morning when she awoke to a man standing over her bed. He was wearing latex gloves.

The intruder groped her, pulled her to his lap and sexually battered her. But on the way out, the man dropped something. The Walmart card with Bannister's name on it was a solid early clue.

But Robinson said the case against Bannister was bolstered when investigators came to his office. He displayed a map that pinpointed Bannister's whereabouts, and it showed that the suspect was in the woman's house that morning.

Bannister pleaded guilty to first-degree criminal sexual conduct and burglary, and he was sentenced last month to 25 years in prison.

His victim contacted attorney Lionel Lofton of Daniel Island after the sentencing. Her lawsuit was filed in a Berkeley County court.

On Wednesday, Robinson challenged the suit's contention that Bannister had been “freely roaming neighborhoods and streets where he was forbidden to be.”

Bannister had let the battery on his ankle monitor die a few times, but Robinson said he noticed no clear bail violations. He had never gone near the victim of the indecent exposure, and his bracelet was never cut off, which happens in many cases when a defendant goes on the lam, Robinson said.

Lofton said he didn't have specifics about Bannister's supposed violations. Those details should be ferreted out during the civil proceeding, he said.

“I have seen violations well before the day of the incident,” the attorney said. “He wasn't at his doctors; he wasn't at church; he wasn't at his lawyer's. He was all over the place.”

## **'Can't be responsible'**

Bondsmen have taken heat for lax reporting of defendants' whereabouts in other cases.

Anthony Willis Jr., an 18-year-old murder suspect ordered to be on house arrest after making bail, let the battery in his monitor fail. The police said he then cut off the device, ventured out, stole a shotgun and pulled off two robberies near Summerville.

Robinson's company issued Willis the GPS tracker. The charges against Willis remain unresolved.

In Charleston, Circuit Judge Stephanie McDonald vowed in September to punish companies that don't closely monitor defendants with GPS tracking. Her moratorium against more satellite devices being issued in Charleston and Berkeley counties was the second time in six years that such a measure had been taken.

But Robinson said the police often fail to act when he asks for a defendant to be arrested for a violation.

In a recent case, he said he recently tracked a defendant on house imprisonment for driving under suspension to a Costco parking lot, where she was getting high on drugs. Robinson called the police, who refused to respond and arrest her, he said.

"These people we deal with already have something wrong with them," he said. "We can't be responsible for what they do."

But for law enforcement officers, a warrant must be issued for a defendant's arrest.

Speaking generally about the issue, Maj. Jim Brady of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office said bondsmen can act without a warrant.

"They have the authority to go snatch the person," Brady said. "It's their responsibility to come off the bond and take that person before a judge."

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