

Del. Matt Fariss arrested on 2 felony charges

Fariss was charged following a traffic incident that injured a pedestrian, according to Virginia State Police.

by **Markus Schmidt**

Cardinal News

March 7, 2023

Update 11:40 a.m. March 7: Virginia State Police have clarified that the traffic incident occurred on Thursday, and Fariss turned himself in on Friday. The story has been updated to reflect that new information, as well as a statement from Fariss and details about the protective order.

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Del. Matt Fariss, R-Campbell County, has been arrested on two felony charges following what Virginia State Police describe as a hit-and-run that injured a pedestrian and led to the woman obtaining a protective order against him.

Farriss, 54, is charged with one count of malicious wounding, a Class 3 felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine; one count of failing to stop after an accident, a Class 5 felony; and one count of reckless driving, a Class 1 misdemeanor, according to state police and online court records.

“While I may have made some mistakes in my life, these charges are false. I look forward to clearing them in a court of law,” Fariss said in an email Tuesday.

The incident happened Thursday afternoon, just days after the General Assembly adjourned its 2023 session. According to Virginia State Police, a 2015 Chevrolet Tahoe was heading south on U.S. 501 when the vehicle crossed the center line, continued off the northbound side of the road and struck a pedestrian. The Tahoe then left the scene. An adult female pedestrian suffered minor injuries.

On Friday, the woman sought a preliminary protective order against Fariss. According to the affidavit, which is filed in Campbell County General District Court, Julie Miles, 56, of Lynchburg initially was in the passenger seat of Fariss’ SUV, which she said he was driving “excessively fast” until a tire blew out.

“During [the] tire change he became irate with a son whom he called to come help, but [the] son did not have a jack,” Miles said in the affidavit. “Then he became furious but his son didn’t show up. His mood went dark and he was being angry and abusive.”

Miles said that she got out of the car and began to walk north up U.S. 501 toward her cousin’s house in Winfall. “He was screaming at me” to get into the car, she said. “I said a firm ‘no’ and kept walking,” she said in the affidavit.

Next, Fariss cut a 90-degree turn to the left toward where Miles was walking, and then hit her with his SUV and got out of the vehicle, yelling that “I should have gotten into the g---d car,” Miles said in the affidavit. She said she was knocked to the ground, and her “sunglasses flew about 8 feet off my head.”

“Luckily a man across the street saw all of this and yelled,” Miles said. “Once Matt saw that there was a witness he got in his car and fled the scene.”

Miles could not be reached for comment Tuesday morning.

Fariss turned himself in the next day and met a state trooper at the magistrate’s office, state police said. He was released on \$7,500 bond and is due to be arraigned in Campbell County General District Court at 11 a.m. March 17.

A Lynchburg native and a resident of Rustburg, Fariss was first elected to represent the 59th House of Delegates district in 2011, succeeding Del. Watkins Abbitt Jr., an independent who retired after 26 years in office.

Fariss currently sits on the Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources committee, the Appropriations and Public Safety committees, and the Health, Welfare and Institutions committee. Fariss faces a challenge for the Republican nomination from former Campbell County Supervisor Eric Zehr.

Fariss is married and has three children. According to his website, he has operated a country store, managed large amounts of real estate, raised cattle, managed farms, and operated numerous businesses. He is currently co-owner and vice president of the Lynchburg Livestock Market, the largest livestock market center in Virginia, the website says.

Last week’s incident wasn’t Fariss’ first brush with the law. In January 2016, he was charged with two incidents, including a misdemeanor

breach of peace in a parking dispute, and a hit and run accident in which property was damaged but no people were hurt. He was found not guilty in the breach of peace and pleaded guilty to misdemeanor hit-and-run.

Grace Mamon contributed to this report.