BY **IAN KARBAL**-OCTOBER 14, 2025 11:14 AM

Cody Balmer, 38, is seen walking on the grounds of the Governor's Residence after starting fires inside April 13, 2025. He pleaded guilty to attempted murder of Gov. Josh Shapiro, 22 counts of arson and related offenses. (Screenshot/Dauphin County District Attorney's Office)

This is a breaking news story and may be updated. This story was updated on October 14, 2025 at 1:24 p.m. with additional information.

Cody Balmer, the Harrisburg man accused of firebombing the Governor's Residence in April as Gov. Josh Shapiro, his family and guests slept inside, pleaded guilty to attempted murder with a sentencing enhancement for terrorism on Tuesday.

Balmer, 38, will serve a total sentence of 25 to 50 years. He'll be eligible for parole in 2050 when he is 63 years old.

Balmer, who confessed to police when he was arrested hours after starting the fire, said that he disagreed with Shapiro's position on the Israeli response to the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by the Palestinian militant group Hamas that killed more than 1,100 people. More than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza in the resulting military campaign, according to Palestinian authorities.

Balmer said he had planned to kill Shapiro with a hammer he carried as he broke into the residence.

All 22 people who were in the residence, including Shapiro, his family, and guests celebrating the Passover holiday, were evacuated safely. All were asleep save two state troopers who were on guard.

Balmer also pleaded guilty to 46 other charges, including aggravated arson, burglary and the reckless endangerment of 22 individuals, including children between the ages of 8 and 16.

Dauphin County District Attorney Fran Chardo said in a press conference after the hearing, "I think it was the right sentence based on, thankfully, that no one was hurt or killed … The fact that it was by guilty plea, that's a good thing."

Video evidence played in court, captured by security cameras around the Governor's Residence, showed Balmer breaking a window with a sledge hammer and throwing a Molotov cocktail into the home. Balmer then broke a second window and entered the residence.

Judge Deborah Curcillo called the video evidence "horrific."

Chardo said in court that Balmer then tried to break down multiple doors in the home, including one leading to a hallway with bedrooms where guests slept. When he was unable to move further into the residence, he set off a second Molotov cocktail and fled the grounds.

The incident occurred early in the morning of April 13, the first night of the Jewish Passover holiday.

Balmer called 911 and turned himself in shortly after the attack. He cited Shapiro's stance on the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, as his motivation for the attack.

According to Chardo, this motivation, along with Blamer's confession that he intended to kill Shapiro with a sledgehammer, was the basis for the terrorism enhancement to the attempted murder charge, doubling the sentence.

Shapiro is the highest-ranking Jewish official in Pennsylvania.

Chardo read a letter from Shapiro and his wife, First Lady Lori Shapiro, in court. The letter said that Shapiro and his family have been left with a "nagging sense of fear," which has manifested in trouble sleeping and anxiety while in public.

"Time has now separated between before the fire and after the fire," the letter said. "It's a fear and anxiety we are learning to live with, but we are expecting to carry with us for a lifetime."

Mary Clapp, one of the public defenders representing Balmer in court, read a letter from Balmer's family.

It described Balmer as a loving father and active community member who had struggled with mental illness in the time before the attack on the Governor's Residence. The letter said Balmer's family had tried to get him help in the days before the incident, suspecting that he had gone off his medication. But law enforcement denied the request because he was not considered an immediate danger.

"While Cody's actions can not be excused, they can only be understood" through the lens of mental illness, the letter said. Members of Balmer's family were present for the hearing.

Chardo confirmed a police call was made and that did not result in involuntary commitment.

"Our mental health procedures act is an old one. It's more than 40 years old," Chardo said. "We need to figure out how to deal with that in a better way so that people are not getting their treatment for mental health by being stuck in jails."

Still, Chardo said the evidence did not justify an insanity plea, and that it was up to the judge to consider whether to mitigate Balmer's sentence on account of his mental state.

Balmer, who had stuck his tongue out at reporters and made cryptic remarks at an initial hearing in April, was more subdued at Tuesday's hearing. He wore a maroon-colored Department of Corrections jumper, with his wrists and ankles chained. His remarks in court were mostly yes or no answers to questions from the judge or district attorney.

Following the guilty plea, Shapiro made an emotional speech outside his office in the Capitol, with Lori by his side.

“To be honest, Lori and I have struggled over the last six months to try and make sense of all of this,” Shapiro said. “The hardest part has been trying to explain it to our four children, and to our nieces and nephews. I’ve carried with me this enormous sense of guilt — guilt that doing this job that I love so much has put our children’ s lives at risk.”

Shapiro also connected the attack to a broader trend.

“I think it’s important that in this time of rising political violence that none of us grow numb to it, or accept this as the normal course of doing business,” he said. “I’ve talked to people who are thinking about running for office who have said they don’t want to, because they don’t want to put their families at risk. These are good people who just want to serve, want to do right by their communities, who are being impacted by this unacceptable level of political violence.”

Shapiro has repeatedly called for cooler rhetoric and an end to political violence following multiple incidents over the last year and a half. They include the shooting of President Donald Trump while he was campaigning in Butler County, and the killing of Melissa Hortman, the former Speaker of the House in Minnesota.

The Capital Star’s Peter Hall contributed to this report.