

whatsoever to Mr. Scheuer," GM spokesman James Cain said in a statement.

GM claimed Scheuer had doctored a federal-government check stub to provide "proof of funds" to move into the family's new home. When the real estate agent found out, the family was evicted, the carmaker said. GM said the real estate agent had come forward after the trial started, and that the company had extensive evidence that it had nothing to do with the family's financial troubles.

Scheuer and his wife both hired criminal-defense attorneys this week after the carmaker accused them of lying.

The case was chosen as the first for trial by Robert Hilliard and Steve Berman, two of the top plaintiffs' lawyers in the U.S., who are leading the ignition-switch litigation. They haven't denied the allegations of forgery and perjury against their client.

'Way past unusual'

Hilliard called the development "unexpected and stunning."

"El Nino is unusual," he said Friday. "This is way past unusual." Still, he said he thought Scheuer had a "strong shot" at winning his case before the recent developments.

"To have any trial end in such an unexpected and unfortunate way is disappointing, especially given the time and effort we put into getting ready," Hilliard said. "There are legitimate concerns about the safety of this vehicle as a result of this defect. A jury needs to decide, and that's unrelated to a dream house issue. The next jury will have that opportunity."

Furman said on Thursday if GM's account of the misleading testimony is correct, it might show that the "plaintiff and perhaps his wife have committed a fraud on this court."

GM recalled 2.59 million cars due to the defect and has already paid more than \$2 billion in legal costs and settlements. Despite GM's admissions, the company is challenging liability in hundreds of individual cases.

Bellwether cases

The Scheuer trial was the first of six bellwether ignition-switch cases intended to help the carmaker and thousands of motorists in possible

settlements and other litigation after GM admitted the flaw affected millions of vehicles.

In the bellwether system, each side chooses representative cases for alternating trials. Now the attention will turn to one picked by GM.

It was filed by plaintiffs who claim they were injured in a January 2014 crash on an icy bridge in New Orleans. GM is already hinting at its defense in that case, which is set for trial in March.

Other accidents

At least 38 other vehicles "had accidents on the same bridge that evening due to black ice weather conditions," Cain said today. "This was a very low-speed crash and there is no claim about airbag non-deployment. Rather, the claim is the switch rotated causing a loss of control."

Furman said it had become clear that Scheuer's case was an "outlier," and that a verdict was unlikely to yield important information about the litigation as a whole.

"Plaintiff's counsel picked the wrong plaintiff and didn't vet him well enough to catch huge problems with using him in a bellwether. The judge cannot be amused," said Erik Gordon, a business professor at the University of Michigan who isn't involved in the case.

Bloomberg and Reuters contributed to this report.