Three men plead not guilty to hazing at EKU

By Ashlee Clark

An attorney for one of three men facing criminal charges in connection with alleged hazing at an Eastern Kentucky University fraternity chapter said the charges are “selective and arbitrary” because other fraternity members have been implicated but not charged.

In a letter given to the Herald-Leader on Tuesday, a fraternity regional director has recommended that nine fraternity members (three from EKU and six from the University of Kentucky) be expelled or suspended from the fraternity.

EKU students Thomas Barnes, 21, and Gabriel M. McLaren, 22, and alumnus Alonzo C. McGill, 32, pleaded not guilty Tuesday to fourth-degree assault charges in the beating of EKU student Brent Whiteside, 23, who was hospitalized March 8 after he sought membership into Kappa Alpha Psi.

Police say the three men struck Whiteside with their fists, a paddle and a cane, causing kidney failure. He spent several days in Central Baptist Hospital in Lexington.

Based on the fraternity letter, UK has charged its chapter with violating the student code of conduct and has suspended the group from campus “until the matter is resolved.”

“The information I have reviewed provides evidence that members and officers of your organization allowed and/or engaged in membership intake activities that resulted in the hospitalization of an EKU student who was a candidate for initiation into Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc.,” Tony Blanton, UK associate dean of students, wrote in a July 8 letter to Michael Girton, president of the school’s Kappa chapter.

Jim Baechtold, the attorney who represents McLaren, said it is unfair that his client, Barnes and McGill, have been singled out in the investigation.

Richmond police have no plans for additional arrests in the case, police spokesman Willard Reardon said.

Baechtold said he hasn't ruled out suing the local and national Kappa chapters for discriminatory treatment of McLaren and McGill, who are represented by the same firm.

The next hearing in the criminal case will be at 9:30 a.m. Aug. 7 in Madison County.

A Kappa Alpha Psi board of directors still has to approve the suggestions made by Willie Brooks, who oversees the south-central region for the Kappas. But the reprimands will be
“standardly accepted” by the fraternity and will probably be approved by Sept. 1, said Richard Lee Snow, executive director of the Philadelphia-based fraternity.

Brooks also advised the fraternity to place the UK and EKU chapters on probation until May 23, 2011.

According to the May 23 letter from Brooks, the following members should be expelled “for their acts of hazing on another person seeking membership into the Fraternity”: McLaren; McGill; Blaine Lynch; Travis Darden; Derrick Johnson; Blake Patterson; Philip Thomas; and Chris Watkins.

Brooks recommended that Barnes be suspended from the fraternity for five years because he participated in the hazing but admitted his role to investigators.

The nine men would also have to pay a $500 fine.

Three “non-members” of the fraternity - EKU students Tashad Myers, Anthony Mudd and Frank Ross - should be barred from undergraduate membership for failure to report hazing activities with Kappa authorities, Brooks recommended.

“Whiteside should be allowed membership into Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. at the next earliest date,” Brooks wrote.

The students did not return calls and e-mails seeking comment.

The expulsions and suspension recommendations are the latest round of sanctions issued to the Kappas at EKU and UK.

Last month, EKU confirmed that hazing had occurred and suspended the chapter for eight years. UK began an investigation into its chapter last month to determine whether its students were also involved in the alleged hazing.

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