



BCPO News

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Two New York High School Students Charged with Assault for Hazing Fellow JROTC Members in Westampton Motel

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina and Westampton Township Police Chief Stephen Ent announced that two members of a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program at a New York high school have been charged with multiple counts of assault and other offenses stemming from hazing incidents that occurred in a Westampton Township hotel during an overnight trip early last year.

The students were enrolled at the Francis Lewis High School in Queens and were on an overnight trip to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst for a JROTC competition in April 2018 when the hazing took place. The incidents, which were reported to police in late June and involved four male victims, occurred at the Hilton Garden Inn.

The investigation revealed that one of the victims was burned on his buttocks with a hot iron in addition to suffering other abuse at the hands of the defendants. A second victim in the room was also mistreated. Later, in another room at the hotel, the defendants forced two other members of the group to engage in humiliating conduct.

“Hazing does not bring organizations together; rather, it tears them apart,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “There is no team-building benefit from injuring and humiliating junior members of a group as a rite of passage. Stripped of whatever ‘ritual’ it purports to be, this conduct is nothing more than assault and bullying, which we will prosecute just as vigorously as any other case, seeking to vindicate the rights and dignity of the victims who are harmed.”

The defendants were extradited to New Jersey on March 28. Probable cause to proceed with the charges was established during a hearing held earlier this month in the juvenile section of Superior Court in Mount Holly.

The defendants were 16 when the offenses occurred. Their names, and the names of the victims, are being withheld because of their juvenile status.

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The first defendant faces charges of Aggravated Assault (Second Degree), five counts of Endangering the Welfare of a Child (Second Degree), two counts of Invasion of Privacy (Third Degree), Aggravated Assault (Third Degree), Aggravated Assault With a Deadly Weapon (Third Degree), Possession of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose (Third Degree), Conspiracy to Commit Aggravated Assault (Third Degree), Criminal Coercion (Third Degree), Aggravated Hazing (Fourth Degree) and three Counts of Hazing (Disorderly Persons).

The second defendant was charged with Aggravated Sexual Assault (First Degree), five counts of Endangering the Welfare of a Child (Second Degree), Conspiracy to Commit Aggravated Assault (Third Degree), two counts of Invasion of Privacy (Third Degree), Criminal Sexual Contact (Third Degree), Aggravated Hazing (Fourth Degree) and three Counts of Hazing (Disorderly Persons).

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Kristine Adler. The investigation was conducted by the Westampton Township Police Department. The lead investigator is Westampton Township Police Detective Sergeant Linda Chieffalo.

Anyone who would like to report information about this case is asked to call the Westampton Township Police Department at (609) 267-3000 and speak to Detective Sergeant Chieffalo.

All persons are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

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