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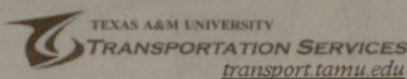
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Parents of fraternity pledge call for hazing crackdown

By Lisa Falkenberg
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — The parents of a Southern Methodist University student hospitalized after chugging water at a fraternity event said Tuesday that universities and national organizations should be held accountable for accidents at fraternity and sorority events.

Braylon Curry, a 21-year-old finance major, was released from a Dallas hospital Monday evening, more than a week after he was hospitalized after drinking an unknown amount of water at an off-campus Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity competition.

Curry's parents said they consider the incident illegal hazing and hope it inspires a crackdown.

"I think it's very easy to take an event like that and isolate it and focus on it for a day or two or three and then it goes away and then it would be another group of parents in the ICU," said the student's father, Bishop Curry, a 52-year-old veterinarian in Maryland. "There needs to be a change."

He suggested universities require direct supervision of fraternity and sorority events or lawmakers increase the penalty for hazing from a misdemeanor to a felony.

"This can't be a void or a vacuum that our young people fall into," Bishop Curry said. "If it's highly supervised, that's the only way that you're going to be able to send your sons and daughters to college and they'll come back to you whole."

Jim Caswell, vice president of student affairs at SMU, said universities try to educate students about hazing but can only do so much.

"The difficulty that we find, quite honestly ... is how do you get at underground, secret activities," Caswell said. "We will continue to try and work at that issue but I must tell you, that's a difficult one."

He suggested parents help by keeping track of

their children's activities.

Curry's parents say doctors are expecting a recovery. Curry, who was unresponsive hours after the water drinking contest and was still listed in critical condition two days later, is now walking, eating and getting his appetite back, his parents said.

Chris Gilliam, a spokesman with the Dallas Police Department, said an investigation is "proceeding slowly." A detective interviewed Curry for the first time Tuesday and no charges have been filed, Gilliam said. He said any charges would be limited necessarily to hazing.

Curry's parents said pledges and some fraternity alumni are responsible for hazing.

Curry's mother, Brenda Curry, said her son was seeking a new group of friends he could keep long after college, but had been skeptical of the pledging process.

"It was about brotherhood, but he hadn't seen any sign of that in the pledging process," she said.

She said the incident prompted her oldest son, 23-year-old Bishop Curry, to tell her that he too had been hospitalized about a year ago after being beaten up while pledging.

Curry's brother decided not to pledge, his mother said.

It will take more than two parents' pleas to stop hazing, says Hank Nuwer, a journalism professor at Franklin College in Indiana and Indiana University at Indianapolis who has written books on hazing.

"It's a well-meaning gesture," he said, but added, "It's creating an atmosphere that creates false hopes for a lot of people and in the end it never produces social change."

Nuwer said parents such as the Curry family call for more research on hazing rituals rather than tougher laws. He said there has been at least one hazing death every year since 1970, but there is too little reliable information on hazing incidents and their prevalence on U.S. campuses.

"This can't be a void or a vacuum that our young people fall into."

— Bishop Curry
pledge's father

Lawyer: Michael Jackson accused never mentioned alleged abuse

By Tim Malloy
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — An attorney who represented the mother of Michael Jackson's accuser in her divorce from the child's father said the family never indicated to him that Jackson had sexually abused the boy.

Attorney Michael Manning said Monday he remembers the mother saying positive things about Jackson as recently as April or May.

"He was really good to us" — that's what she said at the time," Manning said.

Asked if she had said anything else about Jackson, Manning added, "Nothing bad. ... If it turned sour, I don't know how."

The mother filed for divorce in 2001 and has custody. Manning said she and the alleged victim rarely mentioned their visits to Jackson's Neverland Ranch in Santa Barbara County.

"They didn't brag about it," he said. "They weren't star crazy."

The Associated Press does not identify alleged victims of sexual abuse. The child's mother could not be located for comment Monday.

Stuart Backerman, the entertainer's spokesman, declined to comment Monday night.

Santa Barbara County district attorney's office and the sheriff's department declined to comment Monday on the case. Both have said they will not comment until charges are filed.

Jackson launched a Web site Monday designed to tell his side of the story in the case, asserting allegations are "predicated on a big lie."

Jackson put the site together so he could communicate directly with the news media and Stuart Backerman said. Jackson said in his statements the site would serve as a source for "official communications on my case."

The site contains links to three earlier statements Backerman made last week on Jackson's behalf. The statements were made after authorities searched the singer's Neverland Ranch and before the entertainer surrendered on a warrant alleging lewd or lascivious acts with a child under 14.

A public relations executive who is not involved in the Jackson case said the Web site allows the entertainer to bypass the news media and deliver his side of the story to the public.

"He's able to communicate with those people interested without the message being filtered by the media," said Doug Dowie, senior vice president of Fleishman-Hillard.

Jackson was released on \$3 million bail after his surrender Thursday and immediately returned to Las Vegas, where he had been filming a video. Authorities have said they expect to file charges sometime after Thanksgiving.

On the Net:
Jackson's Official Press Release
<http://www.mjnews.us>

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