



Florida files charges in death of FAMU drum major, hazing of 2 others

From Rich Phillips, CNN

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Do hazing charges fit the crime?

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Two suspects in custody in Leon County, officials said

The case does not support murder charges, prosecutor said

Champion died after he was beaten on a bus in November

(CNN) -- The mother of Florida A&M University drum major Robert Champion said Wednesday she had been hoping more severe charges would be filed in her son's death, which authorities said was the result of hazing.

Pam Champion told "AC360" that hazing, which prosecutors said is a term for bullying, doesn't amply describe what happened to her 26-year-old son.

"The term 'hazing' in itself is a very light term," she said. "I don't look at it as being a form of bullying. Hazing is a very brutal assault ... against another person."

Charges were brought against 13 people after an investigation into Champion's death, a Florida prosecutor announced Wednesday.

[See the list of defendants](#)

Medical examiners said Champion died "within an hour of a hazing incident during which he suffered multiple blunt trauma blows to his body."

"This is a homicide by hazing," State Attorney Lawson Lamar said in Orlando.

The case built by investigators does not support a charge of murder, according to Lamar.

"We can prove participation in hazing and a death. We do not have a blow or a shot or a knife thrust that killed Mr. Champion. It is an aggregation of things, which exactly fit the Florida statute as written by the Legislature," Lamar said.



FAMU hazing charges disappoint mom



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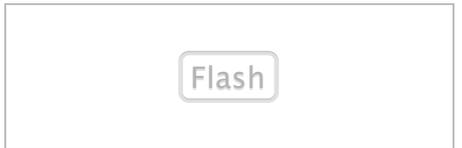
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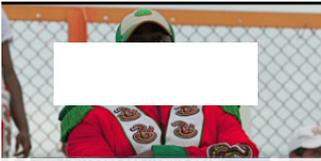
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Charges in alleged hazing death at FAMU



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Pam Champion said prosecutors explained why they pursued hazing charges, rather than murder or manslaughter. She and her husband, Robert Champion Sr., were anticipating "something that was a little more harsh."

Eleven individuals each face one count of third-degree felony hazing resulting in death, according to officials. Each one also is accused of two counts of first-degree misdemeanor hazing. State law provides a prison term of up to six years for those facing the more serious charges, Lamar said.

Two people each face a single count of misdemeanor first-degree hazing. Sentences in such cases typically call for up to a year in jail.

[Read what the hazing statute says](#)

Some of the charges involved two other alleged hazing victims who were not seriously injured, officials said.

"It's all related to the same investigation that began with Robert Champion," said Danielle Tavernier, a spokeswoman for the state attorney's office. "Investigators found these two victims during the course of investigating the death of Mr. Champion."

The drum major collapsed in Orlando on a bus, which was carrying members of FAMU's Marching 100 after a November 2011 football game that included a halftime performance by the group.

Champion's death more than five months ago brought renewed public scrutiny to hazing, a practice that has gone on for years. FAMU said it has taken steps to eradicate the problem.

Authorities declined to identify those who had not been arrested.

Two suspects were being held Wednesday afternoon at the Leon County Jail, according to Lt. James McQuaig, spokesman for the Leon County Sheriff's Office. The suspects were identified as Caleb Jackson, 23, and Rikki Wills, 24. Both are charged with felony hazing resulting in death. FAMU is in Tallahassee, the county seat.

Joyce Dawley, the head of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Orlando division, said one person was being sought out of state.

[Parents: Champion a "poster child" against hazing](#)

Attorney Christopher Chestnut said the Champions don't want to see the futures of students destroyed, but "they want accountability for the murder of their child."



Rikki Wills, 24, was arrested and charged Wednesday with felony hazing resulting in death.

Some university band members have said Champion died after taking part in an annual rite of passage called "Crossing Bus C," an initiation process in which pledges attempt to run down the center aisle from the front door of the bus to the back while being punched, kicked and assaulted by senior members.

[Band camp, other clubs suspended](#)

An autopsy found "extensive contusions of his chest, arms, shoulder and back," as well as "evidence of crushing of areas of subcutaneous fat," which is the fatty tissue directly under the skin.

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Caleb Jackson, 23, also was arrested Wednesday on a hazing death charge.

The Champions filed a lawsuit this year accusing the bus company and the driver of negligence. An estimated 30 people were on the vehicle.

Fabulous Coach Lines President Ray Land said before the suit was filed that the company's employees, who were not on the bus at the time, responded quickly after learning that there was an emergency, even following the ambulance transporting Champion to the hospital.

[Family sues bus company, driver](#)

The school's band director, meanwhile, asked for full reinstatement Wednesday.

An attorney for Julian White, placed on paid administrative leave shortly after Champion's death, said White worked to root out hazing over 22 years as director.

"Dr. White remains disappointed that barely 48 hours after meeting with band members that Robert Champion was killed in an extreme, horrific and illegal act of bullying," White's attorney, Chuck Hobbs, said in a statement.

The death prompted the university board of trustees to approve an anti-hazing plan that includes an independent panel of experts to investigate.

"We are vigorously working to eradicate hazing from FAMU and doing everything within our power to ensure an incident like this never happens again," President James H. Ammons and Solomon Badger, chairman of the trustees, said in a statement issued Wednesday. "Our hearts and our prayers are with the Champion family and the extended FAMU family as we all continue to deal with this tragedy."

Lamar said Champion's death was "nothing short of an American tragedy."

"No one could have expected that his college experience would include being pummeled to death, an event that some, early on, mistakenly called a rite of passage," he said.

CNN's George Howell and Vivian Kuo contributed to this report.

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BorisCarloff

Violent blak males and mugshots go together like rice crispies and milk.

3 hours ago

Like Reply



Yoe

"Hazing is a very brutal assault ... against another person." Not true, to me, hazing is an initiation ceremony. It could be anything from having your feet tickled with a feather to walking down a aisle of a bus while others wait on you. Your not forced into it.

9 hours ago

Like Reply



scopedope

Mama want's some easy money!

2 days ago 1 Like

Like Reply



hornytoad78

Charge all 13 with second degree murder! Their punches kicks etc killed someone. Bullying, hazing is wrong in all circumstances.

2 days ago 4 Likes

Like Reply



persona1

Murder is murder!!
Any parent who would let their kid go to FAMU needs their head examined!
FAMU, Penn State, the list is growing of colleges and universities that should be SHUT DOWN!!!

2 days ago 5 Likes

Like Reply



Lil Bit

Trying to stuff this under "hazing" makes it sound like it was a bunch of kids who really didn't know that kicking and beating a person viciously could permanently injure or kill them. The two guys in those photos aren't kids by any stretch of the imagination. Either one of them looks big enough and strong enough to beat a person to death by himself.

Every adult involved in this crime had to know their own strength when they chose to brutalize another human. They all need to be charged for the murder that this is.

2 days ago 8 Likes

Like Reply



aobrien77

I made it through 4 years of college without being in a sorority or any other "club" on campus. I have a great job with a great future. Why do people feel they have to be part of a clique to be accomplished or

make friends?! These people were definitely not his friends!!

2 days ago 5 Likes

Like Reply



KappinKrunch

Sounds like his passion was for the band and to be in the band one must undergo a beating. His choice would have been to be seen as a whiner and complain about the hazing requirement or to get on the bus and get the cr*p beat out of himself. Unfortunately, he felt the pressure to do the latter. Count yourself lucky that your passion in college didn't involve brutality.

2 days ago in reply to aobrien77 2 Likes

Like



Ryan Texan

Hazing is not bullying. People voluntarily submit to hazing. They do not voluntarily submit to bullying. He CHOSE to run down the bus aisle knowing full well what would happen.

Certainly it isn't a good idea, but neither is skydiving - yet we let people participate in that dangerous activity - and don't put the pilot of the plane they jump out of in jail when the chute doesn't open.

The other big problem is proving which blow killed him, and then who landed the blow. Some of the people surely gave him nothing but a minor bruise on the arm - the kind of stuff kids have always done in schoolyard games. They will have to prove which person actually harmed the kid. Consider the football game they just left. Players can die. They voluntarily submit to a beating. They end up with bruises, permanent injuries or concussions. Do we put the entire opposing team in jail? Do we say: each hit contributed to the death or injury? No. They voluntarily submitted to it. Freedom means letting people choose their risks. He knew the risk: he suffered the consequences of his decision.

2 days ago 4 Likes

Like Reply



KappinKrunch

"Hazing is not bullying. People voluntarily submit to hazing." Except that it is bullying because there is extreme peer pressure to submit to the hazing or be an outcast.

2 days ago in reply to Ryan Texan 2 Likes

Like



Shinea

its - That's a ridiculous statement to make. No one would submit to something like that if they thought they were going to die. Neither would the participants have done it if they had thought they would kill him. He, in fact, DID AGREE to the hazing, he CHOSE to remain with that group of people, whose culture, rightly or wrongly, included physical beating as a part of the hazing. Obviously, none of them knew it would end the way it did, but they were ALL aware of how it would start.

2 days ago in reply to Ryan Texan 1 Like

Like



Ryan Texan

There was no "victim". He participated in the hazing just like the people in the bus. Again, his choice. In a free society, we let people make these types of choices. There is no law mandating condom use, but millions of people have died due to diseases they picked up having unprotected sex. Should we make that against the law? Consider sodomy laws. The evidence is clear about how that is a dangerous behavior that can lead to death. But it is now legal. The courts found that even though it spreads disease in society and kills many of the people who engage in it - it is still a person's choice.

What most people want is some consequence free life. That they can do what they please and someone else will bail them out. Or a Gov't that prevents them from making bad decisions like going down the bus aisle to be hazed. Since no one had ever died from going down the bus aisle being hit, why would we expect any of them to think it was a dangerous activity? We now want to hold them accountable for not being able to predict the future when there was no evidence of a problem in the past?

2 days ago in reply to Ryan Texan 2 Likes

Like



Lil Bit

The victim was firmly against hazing. He didn't participate willingly in his being beaten to death.

2 days ago in reply to Ryan Texan 1 Like

Like



Itsmeee

Really? That's what you believe? He went down the isle knowing he was going to die? I don't think so. These weren't kids they were very big boys, (not worth calling them men), who used a

force that caused internal bleeding. They may not have meant for him to be injured in a way to cause death but this needs to stop so other families don't lose thier loved ones. Hazing and bullying needs to stop now or the deaths will keep accumulating. There always needs to be one or few people held accountable so others learn not to do something so stupid as to take anothers life intentional or not.

2 days ago in reply to Ryan Texan 4 Likes

Like



scriss

Where's Jesse, Al, and all those other clowns who come out of the woodwork when one of their 'bros' gets their civil rights violated?

Doesn't this guy rate?

2 days ago 5 Likes

Like Reply



KappinKrunch

Another difference between this case and the Trayvon Martin case, for instance, is that the authorities didn't try to sweep this crime under the rug. These guys are getting brought to justice and I'm willing to go out on a limb here and say I doubt they have websites where people have donated over \$200,000 for their defense. So Jesse and co. haven't jumped in because they didn't need to. Bubba and co. didn't jump in because, well, because they looked at the photos of the perpetrators.

2 days ago in reply to scriss 3 Likes

Like



ModeratelyMe

Um. Look at the suspects.

2 days ago in reply to scriss

Like



aobrien77

Nope, it wasn't "white on black", "hispanic on black", or any other mix or races. They only stir up racial riots.

2 days ago in reply to scriss 2 Likes

Like



cracker1000

I've known adults who went back to school to get different skills or to better themselves. They usually are day students who commute, and then work in the late afternoon and evenings.

This guy was 26 years old. Not a teen. Rather than doing extra-curriculars that are meant to keep antsy young adults occupied, he should have been grown up and donning adult responsibilities and ingraining good work habits. Making some money. Gaining experience to put on a resume. Instead of behaving like a newbie frat yoyo, and going along with it all.

C'mon. Baby Huey.

2 days ago

Like Reply



tmnbates

This young black man was beaten to death by a large number of men. It appears that he is just as dead as if he had been hung or shot. So, why is there no outrage? I'm sure he couldn't of known the hazing would involve serious physical assault. Sounds like 2nd degree murder to me.

2 days ago 2 Likes

Like Reply



Brent Reynolds

"This young black man was beaten to death by a large numbrer of men". If you are going to label the victim as a young black man at least label the "large number of men" as black also. This is "black on black" crime. No whites, hispanics, etc.

2 days ago in reply to tmnbates

Like



phalcon1

not men... he was beaten to death by people.
no outrage? I see plenty of outrage.

2 days ago in reply to tmnbates

Like



Annbann

Ethical questions are being raised both inside The Virginian-Pilot and in the Norfolk, Va. area after two of the paper's reporters were attacked and beaten by a mob of at least 30 blacks, but was downplayed by police and withheld from the public for more than two weeks by the newspaper's editors.

2 days ago 2 Likes

Like Reply



bibleverse1

The school fosters an environment of hazing in the guise of tradition. I hope that this case makes the practice not tolerated at any institution.

2 days ago 3 Likes

Like Reply



Congito

What is wrong with you people, this woman lost her son and your reply is she wants money? Her son is stupid? They have no one to blame? You all are some stand up citizens.

2 days ago 7 Likes

Like Reply

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See the list of defendants

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