

Preliminary Hearings Begin for Penn State Fraternity Hazing Death



Summary: *Pretrial hearings have begun into the case involving the death of a fraternity pledge after a night of drinking.*

The hazing incident at Penn State's Beta Theta Pi fraternity that left a 19-year-old dead has entered the preliminary hearing stage. Timothy Piazza died after a night of heavy drinking for a pledge ceremony that resulted in a blood alcohol limit over three times the legal limit and caused multiple internal injuries from stumbling into walls and falling down stairs.

The fraternity brothers did not call 911 until the next day when he was already cold and stiff. Eighteen former fraternity members are facing charges ranging from hazing to aggravated assault. Eight of the members face involuntary manslaughter, reckless endangerment, aggravated assault, and hazing. Four are charged with reckless endangerment and hazing. Six are charged with evidence tampering. The fraternity is facing hazing and involuntary manslaughter charges.

Evidence presented during the preliminary hearing include text messages, internet search results, and video of the night. Some of the text messages include, "Make sure the pledges clean the basement and get rid of any evidence of alcohol," and "I don't want to go to jail for this." One internet search was "How would 9 drinks in an hour affect a 200 pound guy."

A forensic pathologist stated his death "was the direct result of traumatic brain injuries." Video shows Piazza

The defense focused on a detective's testimony. The detective admitted that it was unclear how much the victim had to drink during the actual hazing event and the separate party downstairs. The detective also noted that there was no reason to believe the pledges would be subjected to physical harm if they didn't drink and could have left at any time.

The video of the night does not show everything that happened. What it does show are four members carrying him upstairs after he had fallen down the stairs. At that time, a large bruise was visible on his body which prosecutors claim was from a spleen injury. The members put him on a couch, of which he later fell off. Later the brothers put a backpack on him so he couldn't roll over onto his back and choke on his vomit. The video continues to show Piazza attempting to get up several times during the night, rocking in a fetal position, standing up and walking into walls, and more.

By 7 a.m., another fraternity pledge is seen sitting with Piazza on the couch, taking a video or picture of his condition. That pledge then left Piazza alone, allowing Piazza to wander to the basement again. The video shows him being carried out of the basement two hours later. It then becomes clear that Piazza is dead but no one attempts CPR on him. Some try to touch him or shake him but still no one calls for help. The members then try to redress Piazza but his body has become too rigid. Nearly an hour after they find him unresponsive in the basement, a member calls 911 while the others tried to clean up the "evidence of beer and alcohol."

One defense attorney explained, "Of course, it's a tragedy. But that doesn't mean there's any intent involved in any of this." Another attorney added, "This is not somebody who's got a gaping head wound that's gushing blood. This is somebody who's blood alcohol was three times the legal limit and apparently had some internal injuries. He probably looked like just another frat kid."

The Beta Theta Pi fraternity has since been barred from campus. The Infrafraternity Council already had measures in place that required "social checkers" hired by Penn State to check on events. The social checkers were from a private security company that arrived to check the party and left at a few minutes and just before Piazza fell down the stairs. It is not known if the social checkers filed a report or if the fraternity passed inspection but the detective noted that there were still alcohol boxes in the hallways so it did not appear as if they tried to clean up before the social checkers arrived.

Penn State has already announced plans for new safety reforms including having the university take over misconduct for the fraternities and sororities and having university staff members attend social events. They also plan to permanently revoke university recognition for any chapter with "hazing that involves alcohol, physical abuse, or any behavior that puts a student's mental or physical health at risk."

The Infrafraternity Council added, "We agree that added social restrictions, education, transparency and professional staff support are critical. We have tried to remain committed to being an active part of the solution within our community. We stand firm on our belief that when students are involved in collaborating with the university in monitoring and accountability, a greater impact is made. For that reason, we will continue to push for a partnership between student leaders and the university."

Do you think there is any one person at blame for what happened to Piazza? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about other hazing incidents, read these articles:

- [Felony Manslaughter Charges Levied on 12 Defendants in Florida A&M Hazing Case](#)
- [Fraternity Members May Face Criminal Charges from Pledge's Hazing Death](#)
- [\\$8.3 Million Lawsuit Says Hazing Cost One Student His Eye](#)

Photo: today.com

