

# Judge could dismiss charge in hazing case if man behaves a year

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CHESAPEAKE — The sole adult suspect in a hazing incident at Western Branch High School could have an assault and battery charge dismissed if he remains on good behavior for a year.

Jareth B. Strickler, 18, of the 4000 block of Woodland Drive in Chesapeake appeared Thursday in Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court on three counts of assault and battery. The charges stem from an incident on Sept. 8 in which three students were abducted from the school, taken to the Bowers Hill area of the city and pelted with human and animal waste.

Strickler was one of seven males arrested.

Judge Larry D. Willis Sr. ordered Strickler to have no contact with the hazing victims and barred him from school property. If Strickler fails to remain on good behavior during the next year, he could be subject to 12 months in jail, Willis said.

In a plea agreement, two of the three assault and battery charges against Strickler were withdrawn. Willis found enough evidence to convict Strickler of the third charge but will withhold judgment for a year.

“It seemed like a fair disposition,” said Warren D. Kozak, Strickler’s attorney. “He was similarly treated like the other young men.”

Early last month, Willis placed five Western Branch students, ages 16 to 17, on supervised probation for a year for their roles in the hazing. Those students were ordered to perform 50 hours of community service, pay \$150 in restitution and avoid any “hostile” contact with the victims.

As with Strickler, Willis could consider dismissing the cases against the teens next year if they remain on good behavior.

The mother of one victim, given the opportunity to speak in court Thursday, said the hazing has been going on for some time at Western Branch.

“I just hope that all the young men in the courtroom realize how dangerous this was,” she said, before being interrupted by a couple of outbursts by boys in the courtroom.

Willis warned that he had no problem with jailing the young spectators if they would not remain silent.

Thursday’s hearing does not end Strickler’s legal problems.

He was convicted last month in General District of trespassing at the school during the hazing incident but has since appealed the verdict to Circuit Court. A trial is scheduled in that case for Jan. 7.

He also faces charges – unrelated to the hazing incident – in Chesapeake General District Court for possession with the intent to distribute marijuana and possession of paraphernalia. His trial is scheduled for Dec. 10.

In addition to Strickler, a seventh suspect in the hazing, a 17-year-old, pleaded guilty Thursday to one count of assault and battery for his role in the incident. Prosecutors withdrew two other counts of assault and battery against the teen.

The youth also pleaded no contest to a probation violation and is expected to learn his fate in January.