

Six teens handed probation over hazing incident

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CHESAPEAKE — Six Western Branch High School students, charged in a hazing incident at the school, will spend the next year on supervised probation. The boys, ages 16 or 17, were each ordered to perform 50 hours of community service and make restitution of \$150. They were warned to have no “hostile” contact with the three victims of the Sept. 8 hazing incident.

The accused teenagers, flanked by parents and lawyers, appeared together Tuesday in Chesapeake Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Judge Larry D. Willis could consider dismissing the cases against the teens next year if they successfully complete probation. The boys face other consequences, including the possibility of jail, if they violate probation. “Based on the evidence I’ve heard, I don’t think there’s any punishment that would be too harsh.” Willis told the boys as they stood before the bench. “This kind of thing can’t happen again.”

Willis described the boys’ behavior as “stupid, dangerous, gross and illegal.” Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney Karen Brown said the victims were forced into an SUV and taken from the school to the Bowers Hill area of the city. The victims were placed in a ditch and pelted with human and animal feces and urine, vomit, fish, pickles, liquid from a portable toilet and other matter.

Estimates vary as to how many current and former students were at the Bowers Hill site during the hazing, Brown said. The numbers could be about two dozen or more. The hazing at the school had become a yearly initiation for freshmen during the first weeks of school. This year, however, some participants were arrested.

“It had grown well out of control,” said David W. Bouchard, the attorney for one of the boys. “I guess the question is who is responsible for allowing it to get out of control. The impression I get is that everybody knew it was going on.”

All six of the boys pleaded not guilty to charges of either abduction, assault and battery, or both. They entered the pleas with the stipulation that the commonwealth's evidence is enough to find them guilty.

Their probation will include a 9 p.m. curfew, unless they are working. Chesapeake's Juvenile Probation will determine when and if the supervised probation should be changed to unsupervised.

"This is a message that this will not be tolerated, that this has gotten out of hand," said Moody E. "Sonny" Stallings Jr., an attorney for two of the boys.

"These are 16- and 17-yearolds, and they don't always do the smart thing," Stallings said.

Attorneys Bouchard, Stallings, **Ben Hamlet** and Leo Sharpe represented the boys, who must now await a School Board decision Monday on punishments within the school system.

Jareth B. Strickler, the sole adult charged in the hazing, faces a trial next month in Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. The 18-year-old Chesapeake resident faces three charges of assault and battery. Strickler also faces a related trespassing charge next week in General District Court.

Several questions about the hazing incident have gone unanswered.

Did teachers, administrators or school security know about the annual initiation? If so, why wasn't the hazing stopped years ago?

Thomas Cupitt, the school system's spokesman, said he could not talk about those issues or the upcoming School Board hearing.