

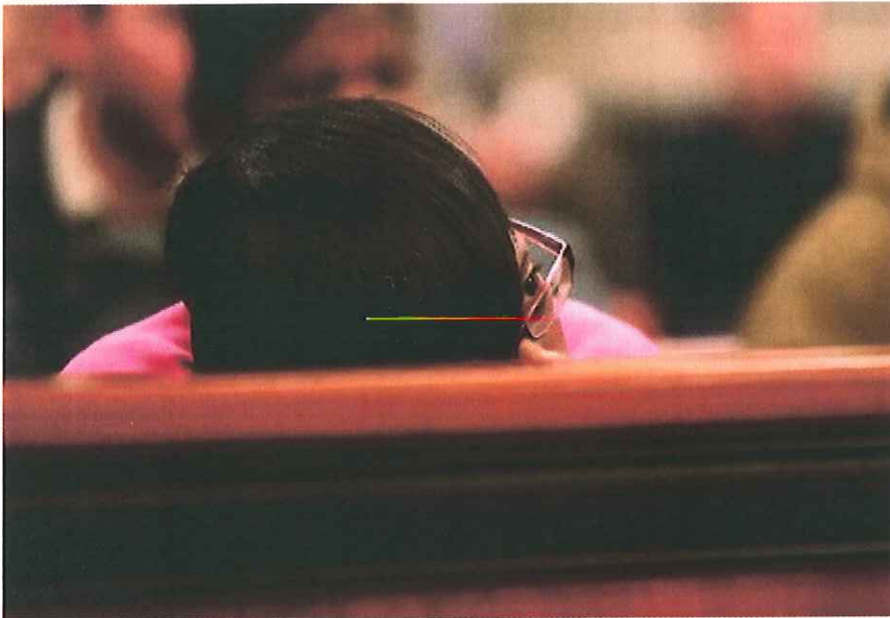


Everything Jersey

Rutgers sorority hazing case to be heard in N.J. municipal court

By Sue Epstein

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John O'Boyle/The Star-Ledger

One of the defendants in the Rutgers University Sigma Gamma Rho sorority hazing case hides her face during a February appearance at New Brunswick municipal court.

NEW BRUNSWICK -- The six members of a Rutgers University sorority who were charged with hazing pledges in January will have their cases heard in municipal court, not state Superior Court.

The Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office remanded the cases against Joana Bernard, 21, of West Orange, Shawna Ebanks, 21, of East Orange, Marie Charles, 21, of West Orange, Kesha Cheron, 20, of Newark, Ilana Warner, 20, of the Bronx and Vanessa Adegbite, 21, of Jersey City, to the municipal court to face hazing as a disorderly persons offense.

Their next hearing is set for May 10.

The students, all members of the Sigma Gamma Rho sorority, were originally charged with the more serious crime of aggravated hazing, a fourth-degree offense.

"We sent it back because the proofs did not rise to the level aggravated hazing requires," said Middlesex County Assistant Prosecutor Neil Casey, who was handling the case.

The six students were charged with striking several pledges on the buttocks with paddles over seven days, between Jan. 18 and Jan. 25.

On Jan. 26, one pledge went with her mother to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick for treatment of injuries caused by the alleged beatings. She then reported the incident to university officials,

telling them she had been hit more than 200 times.

Authorities said the paddlings took place at Rockoff Hall, a student apartment building on George Street in New Brunswick, and in private homes in West Orange and Newark.

The university has suspended the Rutgers chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho, as did the sorority's national organization, headquartered in North Carolina.

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- **Rutgers sorority members are accused of beating pledges during hazing**

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