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Criminal charges possible in suspected hazing death of Prairie View A&M student

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By MICHAEL E. YOUNG / The Dallas Morning News
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The police investigation into the death of Donnie Wade Jr., a 20-year-old Prairie View A&M student from Dallas, has been completed and referred to the Waller County district attorney's office for a possible criminal indictment, according to Hempstead police.

Wade collapsed near the running track at Hempstead High School after an intense early-morning exercise session with other pledges of the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity on Oct. 20. Though a bystander offered to call 911 for help, the pledges carried Wade to a car, bundled him into the back seat and drove him to North Cypress Medical Center, 33 miles away.

They later told investigators that they thought driving Wade to the hospital was the fastest way to get him medical help.

The autopsy conducted by the Harris County medical examiner's office stated that Wade died of natural causes, Hempstead police investigator Ron Martin said, with "acute exertion" a contributing cause.

The investigation names one member of the fraternity, pledge trainer Marvin Jackson, as the defendant in the case, Hempstead Assistant Police Chief Patrick Christian said.

For Wade's family in Dallas, the investigation and autopsy bolster their claim that hazing led to Donnie Wade's death.

"Our contention was the cause of his death was the hazing process," said Kevin Kelley, a Dallas attorney who filed a \$97 million lawsuit on behalf of Wade's parents. "The medical examiner's report has done nothing but confirm those things."

The lawsuit names Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, Jackson and pledge Patrick Range as defendants, Kelley said Friday.

Jackson supervised the exercise session and, according to witness reports, told the bystander who offered his phone that they didn't need help, Kelley said. Range "improperly rendered aid and failed to render aid," Kelley said.

The lawsuit was initially filed in Dallas County but has been refiled in Jefferson County, where Range is from, Kelley said.