



Penn State hazing victim's parents settle with fraternity for money, alcohol-free promise

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The parents of a Penn State student who died in a hazing-related accident last year announced Tuesday they have reached a "pre-litigation settlement" with the national Beta Theta Pi fraternity.

That settlement - which includes an undisclosed payment to the family of Timothy Piazza - also includes a reform agreement that, among other requirements, would have all 135 Beta houses be alcohol and drug-free within two years.

The Piazzas' attorney, **Thomas R. Kline** of Philadelphia, noted the settlement is with the fraternity specifically and solely.

The family may still pursue civil claims against all other parties involved in the case, including Penn State, up until a two-year statute of limitations runs out in February 2019.

But this was an important day in the interim, Kline said.

The Piazzas have been crusading nationally against excesses in Greek life since the bid acceptance night party that left their son dead, and Kline said the legally-enforcable reforms agreed to with Beta were a key step forward for them.

They hope, Kline said, it will "help to establish a baseline for the new norm of fraternity pledging and fraternity life at universities and colleges in the United States."

Among other aspects of the 17-point agreement with the Piazzas, Beta has agreed to:

- * Offer its support for legislative changes that include stepped-up criminal penalties for hazing-related activities that result in death or serious injury.
- * Give the Piazzas a voice in any decision-making involving the future use of the closed Beta chapter house at Penn State, as long as it is owned by the local house corporation.
- * Close local chapters across the country in any cases where to administrators of a college or university have moved to withdraw university recognition because of conduct-related violations.
- * Make immediate notification of conduct violations that result in serious bodily injury or death to university police or public safety a standing policy of all Beta chapters.

Beta's national leaders, in statements accompanying the settlement's release, expressed their continued sorrow and anger over the Piazza case.

But the fraternity's Executive Director, Jeff Rundle, said with the new reforms "we have never been more focused on re-evaluating local chapter cultures and implementing programs and accountability measures that raise the standard of fraternity life wherever Beta Theta Pi exists."

Timothy Piazza, a 19-year-old engineering student from Lebanon, N.J., died Feb. 4, 2017, from complications from unattended brain and other internal injuries received in a series of drunken falls after he accepted a bid to the Beta House at Penn State on Feb. 2.

Those falls - Piazza had just endured a drinking ritual known as "the gauntlet," and continued to drink heavily during an ensuing party - triggered an evening of amateur accident first aid and / or neglect.

It may not have been clear to many of the fraternity members how severe Piazza's internal injuries were.

That's been a major point of contention in three separate preliminary hearings at which state prosecutors have - so far, unsuccessfully - tried to bring involuntary manslaughter charges against former Beta members at Penn State.

But the lack of professional medical attention at any point during the night - tapes show no one at the fraternity summoned help for Piazza for nearly 12 hours - is believed to have contributed to Piazza's death at Hershey Medical Center on Feb. 4, 2017.

The substance-free housing rule is actually something Beta national board voted to impose last winter.

It is not a prohibition against alcohol use at fraternity events - a chapter could still serve alcohol at a rented, third-party venue, for example, or even at an off-campus apartment rented by members.

It is also important to note the Beta's Penn State house was, on paper, a "dry" house when Piazza's death occurred.

But Beta leaders have said they wanted to double down on the policy given internal data showing that 88 percent of chapter closures since 2005 and 95 percent of insurance payouts from 2013 through 2017 occurred at "wet" chapters, and the reality that most fraternity house live-ins are under 21.

Beta is one of five fraternities in the 62-member North American Interfraternity Conference to make all chapter houses substance-free, joining Farmhouse, Phi Delta Theta, Sigma Phi Epsilon and Delta Upsilon.

"While this housing policy is not a silver bullet, Beta's own data is clear that removing alcohol from Beta homes makes our chapters, members and guests safer," the fraternity stated in a document explaining its policy.