

Barron calls for study of Greek life at Penn State

By Shawn Annarelli

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A silent protest was held Monday, March 23, 2015, to ask Penn State administrators to suspend members of a Kappa Delta Rho fraternity Facebook that allegedly posted photos of nude women without their consent. NABIL K. MARK — CDT photo | [Buy Photo](#)



Penn State's hands are tied, and senior Lauren Lewis wants to loosen the knot.

Lewis helped organize a protest of about 20 participants Monday morning at Old Main, where Penn State students stood outside facing the building in silence.

Protesters want Penn State President Eric Barron to summarily suspend any students who were members of invitation-only Kappa Delta Rho Facebook pages "2.0" and "Covert Business Transactions" until a criminal investigation into who posted pictures of nude and partially clothed women is complete.

After a rally Friday, Lewis and six other participants were told by Vice President of Student Affairs Damon Sims that, in accordance with the student code of conduct, the university could only expel or suspend students during criminal investigations if they pose an immediate threat.

On Monday, Sims said that summary suspensions "occur without due process, where an individual is judged to be an immediate threat to another individual or to present risk of imminent harm to the university community and its operations. No such harm is at stake in this instance, so we shall instead follow our usual due process. This includes the ongoing police and university investigations, which should proceed unimpeded, and will inform any disciplinary action that results."

Barron reiterated that Monday afternoon.

"Some have indicated that expulsion or suspension of every member of the KDR fraternity is immediately needed," he said in a statement. "The motivation behind these requests is understandable, however, the criminal investigation by local police into the KDR matter continues, as does the process managed by our Office of Student Conduct."

Barron also said in his statement that he would form a task force to look into fraternity and sorority life at Penn State, which he asked Sims to lead.

"While all of the details are not yet in place, the composition of the task force will include representation from all elements of our university community, including those who have expressed profound concerns about the system," Barron said. "It also will include undergraduate leadership from the system itself, as well as alumni leaders, prevention experts, trustees and representatives of national organizations."

But Lewis said the request is reasonable.

"We are still asking for same thing — an interim suspension for students who belonged to the Facebook page until the investigation is over," she said.

Protesters didn't want administrators to forget their demands over the weekend.

"The message we wanted to convey to President Barron and administrators is that we are still watching and waiting for a response to our open letter, which evolved into a petition, and that it's not an issue that we'll allow to be swept under the rug," Lewis said.

But Barron, in his statement Monday, called for patience.

"Patience is required to allow these investigations to continue unimpeded so that we can achieve a level of justice that fully matches the outcomes of the investigations," he said. "I ask for your understanding as due process proceeds."

Lewis and co-organizer Josie Rose submitted an open letter to Barron on Friday signed by about 200 people.

They also started a petition on causes.com, which had 369 signatures as of Monday afternoon, to demand justice from Penn State administrators.

Lewis said she will continue to organize protests.

She won't however, have another meeting with administrators if it is only her and Rose.

"Another meeting is still in the works," she said. "Someone from Damon Sims' office offered a meeting with Josie and I at the end of our (Monday) protest, and I declined that."

There are about 20 Penn State student organizations unaffiliated with the university that are supporting the efforts, and Lewis wants them to be included, she said.

Barron said the task force would address questions about whether the fraternity and sorority system falls short in meeting its goals and expressed values, what the status is of sexual misconduct and alcohol misuse in the fraternal communities and whether there is accountability for misconduct in the fraternity and sorority system.

Lewis hopes the university's expressed efforts aren't empty promises.

"I hope deep in my heart the school is going to take the right path to justice," she said.

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