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Allegheny College sued over rape on campus

By Keith Gushard Meadville Tribune
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An alleged December 2019 on-campus rape of an Allegheny College student inside her Ravine-Narvik dormitory room by an armed man is now the subject of civil lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Erie.

The suit claims Allegheny College was both negligent and reckless in providing on-campus housing and security to its students including the woman, who is only identified in the suit as Jane Doe.

The suit, filed last week by Kline & Specter law firm of Philadelphia, alleges there was inadequate security at Ravine-Narvik, including a malfunctioning key card system and a lack of both exterior and interior building cameras.

The lawsuit alleges Allegheny College's crime and fire logs reported multiple forcible sex offenses at Ravine-Narvik Hall from 2016 to 2019, as well as multiple reports of suspicious people and trespassers on campus from 2016 to 2019.

"On or about December 10, 2019, as a result of Allegheny College's failure to protect Jane Doe from known and obvious on-campus dangers, an assailant entered Jane Doe's room and raped her at gunpoint," the suit claims.

Allegheny College issued only a brief statement when contacted by the Tribune Wednesday. The lawsuit first was reported by The Erie Times-News.

"Allegheny College is not at liberty to discuss any specific case or situation, directly or indirectly, nor can we comment on pending litigation," Susan Salton, Allegheny's vice president for college relations, said in an email to the Tribune. "The college continues to remain steadfast in its comprehensive efforts to provide a safe and secure campus for the entire campus community."

No one has been charged in the case and the investigation remains open, Chief Michael Tautin of Meadville Police Department said Wednesday.

The attacker was described by police as approximately 20 years old with light brown skin, more than 5 feet, 7 inches tall, wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt and red, white and blue hat, and carrying a handgun. The attack happened at approximately 1:30 a.m. Dec. 10, according to police.

The suit alleges Doe was in her third-floor dorm room alone and in bed when there was a knock at her door.

"Jane Doe's door had no peephole, peek hole, spyhole, door hole, door viewer or other mechanism to allow the room occupant to observe who was on the other side of the door," the suit alleges.

The armed man was able to enter the room and attack Jane Doe due to unsecured entrances to the dormitory and Doe's inability to identify the person on the other side of the door, the suit claims.

The suit also claims that, while the exterior entrances to Ravine-Narvik Hall were accessible through proximity access cards or student identification cards, the card-entry systems regularly failed to operate or function, causing students to prop or hold open the exterior doors for access.

“As a result of unsecured entrances to Ravine-Narvik Hall and Jane Doe’s inability to identify the individual on the other side of the door,” an assailant entered her room and attacked her, according to the suit.

The suit claims Ravine-Narvik Hall had no one assigned to verify identities of residents or visitors and had no security personnel posted in the building.

The suit alleges Allegheny was aware or should have been aware entrances to its residence halls, including Ravine-Narvik, were not secure; that the college failed to fix, repair or address the issue of faulty doors and malfunctioning key card entry systems; and that students opened or propped open doors to residence halls for extended periods of time.

The suit is asking for a trial, though no date has been set by U.S. District Court.

In the wake of the attack and a Dec. 10, 2019, meeting between Allegheny students and administrators, the college said it was working to increase security of its residence halls.

“We are looking comprehensively at residence hall security, including overarching systems and individual residence hall doors and locks,” Salton wrote said in an email to the Tribune on Dec. 11, 2019.

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