

DETROIT

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Jury selection begins in federal trial of Memphis officers charged in Tyre Nichols' death



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Jury selection began Monday, Sept. 9, in the federal trial of three former Memphis police officers charged with violating the civil rights of Tyre Nichols, the 29-year-old Black man who died following a brutal beating by police in January 2023. The incident, captured on police cameras, ignited protests and calls for police reform nationwide.

Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, and Justin Smith face charges of using excessive force, failing to intervene, and obstructing justice through witness tampering. All three have pleaded not guilty.

On January 7, 2023, the police allegedly pulled over Nichols for alleged reckless driving. After being removed from his car, Nichols attempted to flee on foot. Officers caught up with him and violently assaulted him, as shown in police body camera footage. Nichols died in the hospital three days later from his injuries. The autopsy revealed that he died from blunt force trauma to the head, and his death was ruled a homicide.

The three officers on trial and two other officers—Emmitt Martin III and Desmond Mills Jr.—were members of the Memphis Police Department's now-disbanded SCORPION Unit, a specialized crime suppression team. All five officers were fired after the incident and were later charged with second-degree murder in state court. Mills and Martin have pleaded guilty to federal charges and may testify during the trial.

While the trial is expected to last three to four weeks, the incident has also triggered a broader civil rights investigation into the Memphis Police Department.

In September 2023, Assistant U.S. Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Depart-

ment of Justice's Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorney Kevin G. Ritz for the Western District of Tennessee announced the launch of an investigation into potential patterns of unconstitutional conduct within the Memphis Police Department. The investigation, which Nichols' death sparked, is looking into whether the department used excessive force and racially discriminatory practices, particularly during traffic stops involving Black people.

"The tragic death of Tyre Nichols created enormous pain in the Memphis community and across the country," said U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "The Justice Department is launching this investigation to examine serious allegations that the City of Memphis and the Memphis Police Department engage in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional conduct and discriminatory policing based on race."

Clarke emphasized that while Nichols' death was a catalyst, reports of officers escalating encounters and using excessive force over an extended period prompted the investigation. "There are also indications that officers may use force punitively when faced with behavior they perceive to be insolent," Clarke stated.

The investigation will examine whether Memphis police violated constitutional rights through unlawful stops, excessive force, or racially discriminatory policing practices.

In addition to the federal trial and civil rights probe, Nichols' family has filed a \$550 million lawsuit against the City of Memphis, Police Chief Cerelyn "C.J." Davis, the five officers involved in Nichols' death, and other officials. The lawsuit alleges negligence in hiring practices and creating a culture of aggressive policing within the SCORPION Unit.

The trial has drawn national attention, with Nichols' family expected to attend as the officers' trial.

Pharmacists convicted of \$13 million Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurer fraud scheme

A federal jury convicted four pharmacy owners on Sept. 11 for conspiracy to commit health care fraud and wire fraud.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Raef Hamaed, of Maricopa County, Arizona; Kindy Ghussin, of Greene County, Ohio; Ali Abdelrazzaq, of Macomb County, Michigan; and Tarek Fakhuri, of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, all licensed pharmacists, billed Medicare, Medicaid, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for prescription medications that they did not dispense at pharmacies they owned in Michigan and Ohio. The defendants collectively caused over \$13 million of loss to Medicare, Medicaid, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

Hamaed, Ghussin, Abdelrazzaq, and Fakhuri were convicted of conspiracy to commit health care and wire fraud. Abdelrazzaq was also convicted of two counts of

health care fraud and Fakhuri was convicted of one count of health care fraud. Sentencing hearings will be set at a later date.

Hamaed, Ghussin, Abdelrazzaq, and Fakhuri face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on the conspiracy count, and Abdelrazzaq and Fakhuri face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison on each health care fraud count. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI Detroit Field Office and HHS-OIG investigated the case.

Trial Attorneys Claire Sobczak, Kelly M. Warner, and S. Babu Kaza of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case.

More information can be found at www.justice.gov/criminal-fraud/health-care-fraud-unit.

'This is a bond for life' from Sisterhood to the Presidential race



By Trinity Webster-Bass
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

CHICAGO — Kamala Harris has had many roles and titles over the course of her political career. Attorney General, Senator, Vice President and now Democratic presidential nominee.

But for the women who were initiated into Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. at Howard University in the spring of 1986, they know Kamala Harris as "line sister."

"Greetings most gracious ladies of the upper, uppermost house of Alpha Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Howard University, Washington, DC 20059," they all chanted in unison.

Today, I sat down with a few fellow members of the Alpha Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. More than 30 of Harris' sorority sisters celebrated this historical moment. They traveled across the country to meet here in Chicago for the Democratic National Convention. And Monique Poydras, an organizer of the event, shares why her sorority sisters are here to support Harris.

"So, we have gathered here today because we are so excited about our line sister, Kamala Harris, Vice President Harris," Poydras said. "We're here to celebrate her and also to support her in her nomination for president of the United States, and we're looking at an individual who's not only qualified, she's qualified, overqualified for the role. And we couldn't be more proud and humbled about our beginnings at Howard University."

Valerie Phippen-Coutee has known Harris for over 40 years, and before they were sorority sisters, they were best friends.

"We got closer and closer together almost every day, and what we ended up doing was the summer of '85 we decided to go to summer school," she recalled. "So, we worked during the day and went to summer school at night, and that really was difficult, but we were together every night."

Phippen-Coutee continues to tell the story of how she convinced Harris to become a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Black sorority founded at Howard University.

"I remember I had pledged already, and I remember saying to her, 'Hey, you should go out for the sorority. You should really do it.' She was like, 'I don't know. I don't know what I want to do.' I was like, 'Look,

you really need to do it.' And she said, 'I'm gonna do it.' And so she did, and the rest is history."

For many of Harris' fellow members, getting people to the polls and Harris into the Oval Office are personal matters.

Phippen-Coutee, like many of her sorority sisters, had plenty of stories to tell. They spoke of fond memories as they moved through life together.

"She might not remember this, but there was one time I visited her in Oakland, and we went shopping, and I was working, and I believe she had just become working in the District Attorney's office. She kept saying, Phippen. She calls me Phippen. 'Pippen, I need a blue suit. I need a blue suit.' I bought her that blue suit."

And as a line sister Inez Brown explained that they have been with Harris throughout her wearing many suits.

"We have celebrated her along the way," Brown said. "When she was serving in Los Angeles, when she became the Attorney General, some of us were present at her swearing-in ceremony and celebration when she became a U.S. Senator we also celebrated with her in that moment. We were in the room when she took her oath and when she was running for president."

"We galvanized and we did what we could do to influence and encourage people to register to vote and to support financially, because we know money speaks."

What her fellow sorority sisters love most about Harris is her character.

"I just want people to know how much of a genuine person Kamala is, how loving and caring and funny, like we both love to laugh," she said. "And that's one thing we always had in common was laughter."

Brown, who also helped to organize the event, wants people to know that at the end of the day Harris is a person too.

"And I think a unique lens for us is her line sisters, as we get to paint the human side of Kamala," Brown said. "People have only sort of known her in her public service, so they often wonder, 'Is she really this? Is she really that?' 'We are here to say she is authentic and she is genuine and she has never shifted that. No matter what role she has served in. We love her for that, and I think she absolutely loves us for being there for her as line sisters and not people who are just enamored with her space in life.'"

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