



Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUTISM SOCIETY STATEMENT ON THE BEATING OF AARON HILL

We at the Autism Society are shocked and saddened by the Aug. 8 beating of Aaron Hill, a 16-year-old with autism in Okeechobee, Florida. The actions of Andrew Wheeler, 18, who admitted to attacking Hill, were the unthinkable result of a series of moral failures. That Wheeler would hit Hill, drag him by his hair, choke him and hold a knife to his throat is nothing short of horrifying. That several partygoers would have such a lack of concern for a fellow human as to stand feet from Wheeler and watch him seriously injure Hill is deeply disturbing. And that Evadean Lydecker Dailey, who is accused of buying alcohol for the teenagers' party at her home, helped create an illegal and dangerous situation is yet another unbelievable transgression in this case.

It is sad to have to reiterate that the Autism Society believes people should not maim and threaten one another. We expect that police investigate this incident and identify everyone who contributed to the attack. The investigation must also determine whether the beating was a hate crime — a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, ethnic origin or sexual orientation.” Allegations that Hill was lured to the party, then ambushed, raise even more disturbing questions about Wheeler’s motivations in the attack. Investigators must take these allegations seriously and stand up for people with autism.

Wheeler and Dailey should be prosecuted aggressively and sentenced in accordance with the extreme nature of their actions. Beyond that, everyone in this country needs more education about autism and disability in general, and needs to understand that having a disorder or disability does not make anyone any less human or less valuable than anyone else. People need to accept people with autism for who they are. Events like the beating of Aaron Hill (presuming prejudice played a role) are extreme examples of pervasive ignorance about disability and neurodiversity. Only by understanding and accepting people’s differences, and by standing up to those who would hate or hurt others, can we prevent atrocities like this from happening in the future.

ABOUT THE AUTISM SOCIETY

About the Autism Society: The nation’s leading grassroots autism organization, the Autism Society exists to improve the lives of all affected by autism. We do this by increasing public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people with ASD, advocating for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and providing the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy. For more information, visit www.autism-society.org.