

15 Salisbury University students charged in anti-gay hate crime

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Police in Salisbury, Maryland, have charged 15 students from Salisbury University in connection to a heinous attack on a 40-year-old man at an off-campus apartment last month.

The attack occurred on October 15. The victim was targeted due to his sexual orientation, according to law enforcement. One suspect allegedly used the dating app Grindr to lure the victim to an off-campus apartment. Once there, according to charging documents, “Approximately 15 college-aged males appeared from the back bedrooms.”

The assailants “slapped, punched, kicked and spit” on the victim for several minutes while calling him derogatory names. According to the charging documents, one suspect hit the victim “in the head multiple times with a cooking sheet in addition to spitting on [the victim] and calling him [a slur] during the incident.” The victim suffered significant injuries, including a broken rib, and was eventually able to escape, making it to a local hospital.

On November 7, authorities arrested five Salisbury University students for the alleged attack, which followed the arrest of seven students earlier that week. All 12 students were charged with first-degree assault, false imprisonment, reckless endangerment as well as associated hate crimes.

Between November 7 and November 14, an additional three people were arrested and charged in connection with the incident.

The university has suspended all the charged students. Some of them were members of a fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE), which also expelled them. The university also suspended the SAE chapter on campus.

On November 11, students gathered for a community vigil and walk at the university to show support and

solidarity against anti-LGBTQ+ hate.

Salisbury is the largest city in Maryland’s Eastern Shore region, with a population of 33,050. The city is a major commercial and logistical hub and home to Perdue Farms’ headquarters and major processing operations, making it a significant center for the poultry industry.

According to the 2020 US Census, the city had a median household income of \$41,905 with 24.7 percent of the population living below the poverty line, compared with the national household median income of \$67,521 and national poverty rate of 11.4 percent.

Only one of the students charged is from Salisbury, while another is from Milton, Delaware. The others are all from different parts of central and southern Maryland within an hour’s drive from Baltimore or Washington D.C.

In recent years hate crimes have been on the rise. According to the FBI, in 2023 there were 11,862 hate crime incidents compared to 11,634 in the previous year. In some 18.4 percent of reported incidents in 2023 the victims were targeted due to their sexual orientation.

In the past two years, hate crimes based on sexual orientation are up 36.8 percent nationally while those based on gender identity have increased by 48 percent.

In an incident similar to Salisbury, on Tuesday, D.C. police arrested a 16-year-old in connection with an attack on a gay model last month. The alleged assailant was charged as a juvenile with assault with significant bodily injury, according to a police statement. Other individuals are believed to have participated in the attack.

The Salisbury attack occurred in the midst of a fierce election campaign between President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris, in the

context of increasing homophobic and transphobic rhetoric from the far right. The Republican Party has pushed transphobic attacks on who is allowed to participate in high school sports, and during the presidential debate and in a wave of television ads Trump ludicrously claimed that Harris supported “transgender operations for illegal immigrants.”

Trump has sought to broaden his appeal among the youth by elevating socially backward, superficial conceptions of machismo and masculinity—being a “tough guy.” Trump appeared in videos and on various podcasts with influencers associated with extreme sports and other topics which appeal to a younger male audience.

Unemployment is high among this layer. An August report in *Fortune* notes 20 percent of young men qualify as NEETS, “that is, ‘not in employment, education, or training.’ Many of them are college-educated men.”

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2023: “The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a trend already on the rise, as youth suffered higher employment losses than older workers and quit their studies due to the massive disruptions in education and on-the-job training. There has been minimal recovery.”

The report stated that at least 23 percent of youth globally can be considered as NEETs.



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