

Parents Demand Answers In Son's Boot Camp Death

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PANAMA CITY, Fla. -- Martin Lee Anderson played basketball and hung out with other kids in this hardscrabble neighborhood of barred windows and attack dogs that surrounds the cemetery where he was buried last month.

He made the honor roll last year and had not been in serious trouble before he and four cousins were arrested last June for taking their grandmother's Jeep Cherokee from a church parking lot and crashing it.

Although 14-year-old Anderson wasn't the driver, he was charged with grand theft. Other problems followed, including suspension from school and an arrest for trespassing.

On Jan. 5, he was admitted to the Bay County Sheriff's Office Boot Camp. Two South Florida legislators who have seen a video tape of his last conscious moments say he was brutally beaten by guards who kicked and punched him.

Anderson's death has led some state leaders to demand changes at Florida's military-style boot camps.

Rep. Gus Barreiro, R-Miami Beach, who viewed the video last week said it shows a brutal beating.

"Even toward the end of the videotape, where you could just see there was pretty much nothing left of Martin, they came out with a couple of cups of water and splashed him in the face," Barreiro said.

"When you see stuff like that you just want to go through the TV and say, 'Enough is enough. Please stop hitting this kid,'" he said.

Rep. Dan Gelber, D-Miami Beach, a former federal prosecutor, also expressed outrage after viewing the tape, and said he did not think there was any question that excessive force was used.

Bay County Sheriff Frank McKeithen released a statement calling Barreiro and Gelber "loose cannon politicians," and said the two made "irresponsible premature and incorrect statements."

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement has said Barreiro and Gelber were allowed to view the tape because they serve on the Criminal Justice Appropriations Committee. Several members of Gov. Jeb Bush's staff also were allowed to view the tape.

But Anderson's parents, Gina Jones and Robert Anderson, have not been allowed to see the last conscious moments of their son's life.

"No human being on this earth should go through what my son went through. I just wish they could have done me like that instead of it being him," Robert Anderson said.

Anderson's family wants the video of his admission to the camp made public, but FDLE has refused to release the tape, saying it is part of the ongoing investigation.

"I feel I need to see it. I feel I should be the one to see it," Anderson said.

The highly rated Bay County program for juvenile offenders was developed by Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Guy M. Tunnell when he was Bay County sheriff.

In a statement on Friday, Tunnell said he is considering releasing the video with the images of other juveniles digitally obscured because of comments made by the legislators who viewed it.

"The premature disclosure as reported in the press has skewed this normal process," he said.

"We now fear that public perception will be based on hearsay rather than reality."

He called the legislators' comments "premature at best" and "irresponsible at worst."

Jones recalled dropping her son off at the camp, when he said he would do whatever it took to succeed.

She said she will always regret promising him as they parted that things would be OK for the next six months.

"What was my baby thinking when he was down on the ground and they were doing those things to him? Was he thinking that 'my mom said it would be OK' when they had their knees in his back?" Jones said.

The Bay County Sheriff's Office has said Anderson collapsed after he was restrained by guards while doing push ups and other exercises that were part his admission to the camp.

The medical examiner for Bay County is awaiting toxicology reports before releasing his findings. He has said trauma did not appear to be the cause of death.

In several news conferences since her son's death Jones has appeared holding pictures of him smiling or playing basketball. Last week, she carried a picture of him laying in a coffin in a suit.

"This is my baby the day before his 15th birthday," she said weeping.

She said doctors told her that her son's kidneys and liver were too badly damaged from what happened to him at the camp to be donated.

Anderson told The Associated Press that he is dealing with his son's death by keeping his anger under tight control.

"There is so much I want to say but I know it wouldn't be good right now," he said, standing on the street in front of his home, which is just a block a way from the cemetery where his son is buried.

Jones lives in the same neighborhood several blocks away and her mother also lives nearby. Martin Anderson lived with his mother.

Anderson works for a moving company and said he had talked with his son about his plans to get his own truck and have his son ride along with him. He said the boy was excited about the plan.

"Now he'll be with me in spirit only," he said.

Anderson walks over to the cemetery every day and looks at the collection of plastic flowers and dried roses that cover his son's still unmarked grave.

Jones said she tries to show her anger when she talks about her son in public, but when she's alone she remembers her last moments with him and she cries