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Seattle Firefighters Attack Homeless Man Sleeping On Memorial

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Washington - The Seattle City Attorneys Office is reviewing possible misdemeanor charges against two firefighters and a woman accused of attacking a homeless man in Pioneer Square last month. On Tuesday, the King County Prosecutor's Office announced it had declined to file a felony charge against the alleged main assailant, Seattle firefighter Scott Bullene, after it became clear the victim would not participate in the prosecution, said Ian Goodhew, deputy chief of staff for the office.

According to a statement issued by the county Prosecutor's Office: "We reviewed this case because one of the three suspects had potentially committed a felony assault. We have concluded that there is not sufficient evidence to prove a felony assault."

Cases against all three defendants are now being weighed for possible misdemeanor charges, which are handled by the City Attorney's Office. John Schochet, deputy chief of staff for Seattle City Attorney Pete Holmes, said his office will make a filing decision after reviewing the case files.

The two Seattle firefighters were off-duty and accompanied by a woman when they became involved in an altercation at the Seattle Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Occidental Park on March 15.

According to Seattle police, Bullene, fellow firefighter Robert Howell and Mia Jarvinen were walking through Pioneer Square around 5 p.m. after attending a Seattle Sounders game at CenturyLink Field when they saw the homeless man sleeping on the memorial.

Witnesses told police that Jarvinen, 37, kicked at the man, yelled at him and threw food on him after she saw him sleeping on the memorial.

Howell then started yelling about how the victim was disrespecting his "brothers" and began punching and "stomping" the man, police wrote in a report.

The fracas drew other transients, according to police and witnesses.

Steve Banfield, a Pioneer Square resident who witnessed parts of the incident, said the man later identified by police as Bullene then "got in a fight with a different homeless man, took his walking stick and started beating him with it."

In an apparent attempt to ward off the attack, one of the homeless men got up and stabbed Bullene.

Police said they were called to McCoy's Firehouse Bar & Grill and found Howell outside. He told the officers he had been the victim of an unprovoked attack, according to the police report.

Police said he had a strong odor of intoxicants on him but seemed offended when he was asked if he'd been drinking.

Bullene, 45, was treated at Harborview Medical Center for a non-life-threatening wound, Fire Department Lt. Sue Stangl said last month.

According to the police report, Howell and Jarvinen were taken into custody after police questioned witnesses and the alleged victims. Jarvinen was booked into the King County Jail but later released after posting \$20,000 bond.

Bullene works at Station 5 on the Seattle waterfront and joined the department in 1999, Stangl said. Howell, 46, joined the Fire Department in 1997.

The homeless man who police said was attacked because he was asleep on the firefighters memorial refused treatment.

"The homeless man, who was allegedly struck by Bullene, did not want to go forward with prosecution," said Goodhew, Prosecutor's Office deputy chief of staff.

Goodhew said they were only reviewing a felony charge of third-degree assault against Bullene.

The Prosecutor's Office statement indicates the office had also reviewed whether the incident could have been prosecuted as a possible hate crime, known as malicious harassment under state statute.

"We also do not have a provision under state law that allows us to file a malicious harassment charge regarding an alleged victim being targeted based on being homeless. As a result, we are referring the matter to the Seattle City Attorney's Office for the possible filing of misdemeanor charges," the statement read.

Both firefighters are on administrative leave while the case is investigated, according to the Fire Department.

Days after the incident, Seattle Fire Chief Gregory Dean apologized to the public for the two firefighters' alleged involvement in the incident. Dean said firefighters are supposed to protect the public, "not put them in harm's way."

While Goodhew said that Bullene was the primary aggressor, shortly after the incident Deputy Prosecutor Jessica Munca described Jarvinen as the primary assailant in the attack.

"This was a vicious, unprovoked attack on a defenseless person," Munca said. "The allegation is she kicked away a man's food and then kicked him multiple times while he was lying on the ground."

According to her LinkedIn profile, Jarvinen is a senior finance manager at Amazon.com. She has been identified as Bullene's girlfriend.

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