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Trial starting in Corpus Christi state school case

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CORPUS CHRISTI — Jury selection began Monday in the trial of the first of six former employees charged in connection with orchestrated late-night fights among residents at a Texas state facility for the developmentally disabled.

Jesse Salazar, 25, was charged with injury to a disabled person after being spotted along with other staff members at the Corpus Christi State School in almost 20 videos of forced bouts that police called a “fight club.”

State District Judge Sandra Watts called for a potential juror pool of 100 residents. That large pool should signal the case is “something of significant importance,” Watts told the potential jurors.

Salazar’s trial was delayed for a month while a co-defendant challenged whether the graphic cell phone videos that were turned in to police could be admitted into evidence. Those videos are expected to be some of the most compelling evidence at Salazar’s trial.

Prosecutors lined up a key witness Friday when Vincent Johnson, who was scheduled to stand trial with Salazar, pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of negligently or recklessly injuring a disabled person for not stopping the fights.

Johnson received a suspended two-year jail sentence and promised to testify against the other defendants.

The trial of a third defendant, Guadalupe Delarosa Jr., was postponed Friday because his lawyer had a scheduling conflict.

Eleven staff members were identified in the videos. Six were charged. The videos showed that residents were forced to fight each other for the staff’s entertainment. Residents locked each other in choke holds, tumbled to the floor and were kicked and prodded by school employees.

At the time, Adelaide “Addie” Horn, head of the agency charged with overseeing the state schools, called the fights “unconscionable” and said the initial cause appeared to be a lack of supervision on the overnight shift. Guards to provide around-the-clock security were hired and trained.

Horn announced in June that she would retire as Department of Aging and Disability Services commissioner at the end of August.

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