Fraternity Raises Funds For Pledge's Gender Transition Surgery

A college fraternity in Boston has raised more than twice the money needed to pay for a new pledge's gender transition surgery.

The Phi Alpha Tau fraternity at Emerson College began raising money for sophomore Donnie Collins early this month after his insurance company wouldn't cover his breast removal surgery. Their initial goal was $4,800, but donations had exceeded $17,000 by Wednesday afternoon, more than double the procedure's $8,000 price.

In a note posted this week with a thank-you video on YouTube, Collins said the surgery with a Springfield plastic surgeon would be scheduled this week.

"I don't even know what to say because the words 'thank you' don't do it anymore," Collins, 20, said on the video.

"I know that for me, personally, feeling guilty and feeling like, 'Am I worth all this?' has been huge theme of my existence in general," he said. "You just have to let it go because if people want to help, you have to let them help you."

Extra money donated in the ongoing campaign will go to a group that gives grants for similar surgeries for transgender people.

Phi Alpha Tau treasurer Christian Bergren-Aragon said he thinks a major reason the campaign caught on is because it defies the stereotypes of fraternities, which are often associated in popular culture with hedonism, poor grades and drunken antics.

"(I) don't think a lot of times, the good side of fraternities are shown, and we were able to do that, which is awesome," he said.

Collins, a screenwriting major and Virginia native, pledged just this month with Phi Alpha Tau, which Emerson director of student life Jason Meier described as a progressive, forward-thinking fraternity with many gay men. He said the fraternity is demonstrating values the school emphasizes for fraternities, including caring unconditionally for people and respecting human dignity.

"To see them living it ... it's giving a lot of worth and meaning to a lot of these traditional fraternity values that groups say they live by," he said.

Bergren-Aragon said Collins had only been a member of the fraternity for 11 days when they started the campaign, and they didn't tell him about it for a week. The campaign was motivated by two things, he said. First, "Donnie Collins is such a great person; he always puts other people before himself, and I couldn't think of

another person who I'd want to raise this money for."

He added, "It was also a good opportunity for our organization to actually demonstrate what we stand for."

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