

Gay issue may cancel prom

By Douglas S. Crocket
Globe Staff

PROVIDENCE — The possibility that the Cumberland High School senior prom will be canceled arose in US District Court here yesterday because of the court suit of a gay male student.

Cumberland High Principal Richard B. Lynch, after more than four hours on the stand, told US District Court Chief Justice Raymond J. Pettine that if the court rules 18-year-old Aaron Fricke should be allowed to attend the dance with another avowed homosexual, "cancellation would have to be considered."

Lynch has denied Fricke access to the May 30 senior reception at Pleasant Valley Country Club in Sutton, Mass., because he wanted to bring Paul Guilbert as his date.

Guilbert last year was denied admittance to the Cumberland senior reception because he wanted to bring another male.

Judge Pettine, after hearing legal arguments and agreeing to accept briefs from both sides, took the case under advisement and promised to make a decision before the prom.

Lynch, the last witness in the two-day hearing, maintained that he barred Fricke and Guilbert be-

cause he feared for their safety.

Fricke, whose case has been backed by the National Gay Task Force, was punched in the face by a student in a school corridor last week. Fricke suffered a five-stitch wound and a black eye.

On the stand yesterday, Lynch said he could not guarantee the safety of the gay pair outside the dance itself.

He said there was a possibility that Fricke's car could be forced off the road en route to the prom, and he cited a potential danger in the parking lot and in the restrooms.

One of Fricke's two attorneys, John Ward, cross-examining Lynch, suggested that Lynch or one of his assistants could drive the gay couple to the dance, thus ensuring Fricke's safety.

He also suggested that teachers could accompany the couple to the restroom to protect them.

"I don't believe that is my responsibility," Lynch answered.

Lynch said the fact that the prom was being held outside Rhode Island; the fact that he believed the couple's appearance at the affair could lead to a disturbance by other students and heavy media coverage would all contribute to the possibility of violence.

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