

House Committee on Primary and Secondary Education
Representative Michael Sheehy
Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 205

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Bird, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the House Committee on Primary and Secondary Education: Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 205. This important piece of legislation will better equip the state to deal with bullying, harassment, and intimidation at all levels of schooling.

House Bill 205 would require school districts, community schools, and STEM schools to adopt an “evidence-based” or “evidence informed policy” policy requiring disciplinary action against any student who commits an offense of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. This bill also permits a district or school to provide counseling services for a student who is issued a detention or other form of discipline, as well as for the victims of bullying and harassment. These measures, coupled with the “evidence-based model,” will ensure that punishment is not the sole outcome for situations like these, but also rehabilitating behavior to reduce future acts of bullying and harassment.

House Bill 205 also reforms Ohio Law in regards to hazing. Under current law, the definition of hazing is limited to “doing any act or coercing another, including the victim, to do any act of initiation into any student or other organization. This bill makes two changes to this definition. The first expands the definition to include “any act to continue or reinstate membership in or affiliation with any student or other organization.” The second change specifies that hazing may include coercing another to consume alcohol or a drug of abuse. House Bill 205 also increases penalties for those who engage in hazing or recklessly permit the act of hazing.

In just the past two years, Ohioans have mourned the tragic deaths of two university students due to hazing. On November 12, 2018, Collin Wiant of Dublin, Ohio, died in a fraternity’s annex house at Ohio University from asphyxiation due to nitrous oxide ingestion. Just two months earlier, Collin was selected as part of the fraternity’s 2018 pledge class. The family’s lawsuit against the fraternity outlined an extensive amount of hazing perpetrated against the pledge class, including physical abuse, forced consumption of alcohol and drugs, and sleep deprivation. No student should have to endure physical and mental abuse to join a social organization. Just recently, Stone Foltz, a student at the University of Bowling Green, also died as a result of hazing. I will allow Representative Ghanbari to speak about Mr. Foltz.

I want to thank Representative Ghanbari for sponsoring this legislation with me. House Bill 205 is a necessary piece of legislation that will protect our students at all levels of schooling in Ohio and demand accountability when tragedies occur.