



State Senator Stephanie Kunze
Ohio's 16th Senate District

Senator Stephanie Kunze
Senate Bill 126
June 24, 2021
House Criminal Justice Committee
Sponsor Testimony

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leeland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for allowing us to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 126 also known as Collin's Law.

In 2018, Collin Wiant, an Ohio University freshman from Dublin tragically passed away as a direct result from the hazing he experienced at the hands of his fraternity brothers. In the aftermath of Collin's death, I was introduced to Collin's mother Kathleen Wiant and the Wiant family who are my constituents. Kathleen has become a tireless advocate. I have been inspired by the strength and determination that she has shown since the time we have started working together. Her mission has become to make sure we as a state do everything possible to prevent hazing from occurring and educate our college students on the dangers of hazing. As Kathleen has said "We don't want another family to go through the pain and loss our family has experienced... No family should ever have to go through what our family has gone through." Sadly, the family of Stone Foltz, a sophomore at BGSU has. They along with the Wiant family experienced the most painful type of heartbreak imaginable, because of hazing.

This bill is a continuation of House Bill 310 from the last General Assembly but refined to specifically address the problem of hazing on our campuses, without the K-12 bullying portions that were also in HB 310. We have worked with a wide range of stakeholders, including families of hazing victims, the IUC, law enforcement, and prosecutors to make this bill a strong, comprehensive piece of good policy that will start to change the culture on our campuses.

SB 126 contains the same criminal penalties for hazing that were included in the House Passed version of HB 310 from the 133rd General Assembly. This would mean an instance of hazing resulting in serious physical harm would be a third degree felony. The criminal penalty for recklessly participating in, or permitting hazing would be raised to a second

degree misdemeanor. The failure to report hazing would be a fourth degree misdemeanor or a first degree misdemeanor if the hazing violation caused serious physical harm.

In the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, we heard the story of Tyler Perino, a hazing survivor. Tyler shared with the committee the emotions and physical echoes that remain with survivors long after the hazing incident has passed. I would like to thank Tyler for his bravery in standing up for the many who may not have reported the hazing they experienced. As Tyler stated in his testimony, "I believe passage of SB 126 will not only make a real difference in preventing hazing, I believe it will save lives."

This bill would also direct the Chancellor of Higher Education to develop a statewide educational plan for preventing hazing at institutions of higher education. This model policy would be distributed to all institutions of higher education in Ohio. The guidelines will be developed for Students enrolled in an institution, administrators, faculty members, and individuals employed by an institution, and organizations recognized by, or operating under the sanction of, an institution. The institutions of higher education would be tasked with developing an anti-hazing policy. This policy is to be distributed to all student organizations and posted on the university's website. Institutions of higher education would also provide students with an online or in-person educational program on hazing.

This legislation is not only about enhancing penalties but pushes a change in campus culture. Increased consequences for hazing show how serious we as a state will take hazing. The education pieces included in Collin's Law will go towards demonstrating to and educating our college and university students so that they can and will recognize the signs and dangers of hazing.

Collin's Law is supported by over 20,000 students from Bowling Green State University and over 5,000 students from the University of Dayton who have voiced their opinion in support of Collin's Law. Students across the state of Ohio are sick of hazing. With an affirmative vote of this bill, we can send the message that Ohio will not tolerate hazing.

I want to personally thank the Wiant and Foltz families as well as Tyler Perinio for the determination and bravery they have shown to advocate for this bill.

I will now turn the floor over to my joint-sponsor, Senator Theresa Gavarone.