



SB 126 Proponent Testimony House Criminal Justice Committee

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written comments in support of SB 126, both as a representative of Ohio University and on behalf of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police, which also supports this legislation.

I would like to commend Senators Kunze and Gavarone for their work in crafting SB 126, and Chairman LaRe for his commitment to addressing hazing, a heinous practice that has subjected too many Ohioans to emotional and physical harm.

As you know, this bill is named for Collin Wiant who tragically lost his life during his freshman year in college. Ohio University has zero tolerance for hazing, and has been part of the stakeholder effort led by Senator Kunze, along with Collin Wiant's mother, Kathleen, aimed at developing recommendations to prevent hazing in Ohio.

Because of the way the law is currently structured in Ohio, hazing is rarely pursued in criminal prosecutions. The penalties are too low and the burdens of prosecution too high. This has resulted in a situation where I believe the current law does not provide an effective deterrent to this insidious practice.

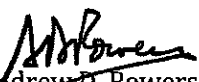
SB 126, or Collins Law, changes that. It expands the definition of hazing; increases hazing penalties; and creates an offense for failure to report hazing.

Specifically, SB 126 increases the offense of hazing from what is now a 4th degree misdemeanor, to a 2nd degree misdemeanor. It also creates a 3rd degree felony offense for hazing through forced consumption of alcohol or drugs that results in death or serious physical harm. Finally, it creates an offense for failure to report hazing—a 4th degree misdemeanor for failure to report that an individual has suffered or is threatened with hazing or a 1st degree misdemeanor in instances where the hazing results in serious injury.

SB 126 not only increases criminal penalties, it provides that uniform and universal anti-hazing policies, with enforcement mechanisms, will be put in place at campuses throughout Ohio to deter this practice. Employees and volunteers who are student-facing will receive education and training on hazing. It also creates true transparency, ensuring students, parents and the public will be fully aware of violations of hazing policies that occur at our campuses.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views on this important legislation.

Sincerely,


Andrew D. Powers
Chief of Police