

Testimony
Of
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Chair LeRa, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Minority Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent written testimony today in support of Substitute Senate Bill 126. My name is Joe Whitehead, and I serve as provost and senior vice president for academic and student affairs. I am providing this testimony on behalf of Bowling Green State University (BGSU).

I am providing written testimony today in support of Substitute Senate Bill 126, sponsored by Senators Theresa Gavarone and Stephanie Kunze. BGSU would like to thank both of the sponsors for their work on this important legislation. BGSU, along with the other thirteen public universities, signed a letter in support of this legislation outlining our views on hazing and our continued commitment to end the dangerous culture and practices at colleges and universities in Ohio.

Hazing is unacceptable and intolerable. It is something that should and must never be excused or rationalized. The recent tragic death of Stone Foltz, a Bowling Green State University student, has once again highlighted the need for additional tools and support to address the problem of hazing.

Bowling Green State University recognizes that hazing is not always limited to a single incident or group and has worked in the past by instituting university-wide efforts to educate students and groups alike, including the requirement of students to sign an oath that a student will not take part or fail to report instances of hazing. The university has worked with students and families to provide ongoing education and trainings to ensure they understand hazing and its unfortunate consequences.

What is clear is that these education efforts are not enough to change the culture and behavior that is needed. We believe the reforms and increased penalties associated with the updated criminal offense of “hazing” in Substitute Senate Bill 126, will have the impact which is needed to help drive that culture change. Additionally, we acknowledge the role that we, as an institution, has to play in changing the culture on our campus as well. We applaud the provisions of the bill, which require each institution to have an anti-hazing policy, issue a hazing violation report, and develop an educational program on hazing. Although BGSU currently has a policy and offers education programming, there is always more that can be done if it means providing a healthy and safe environment for students, faculty, and staff on campus. The bill requires each institution to develop

an anti-hazing policy that includes rules prohibiting hazing, a method to enforce the policy, and appropriate penalties for violations. The policy's penalties are in addition to criminal penalties and may include the imposition of fines, withholding of diplomas or transcripts, the revocation of permission to operate an organization on campus, or probation, suspension, dismissal, or expulsion. These penalties create an additional substantial deterrent and give this provision teeth.

On behalf of Bowling Green State University, we look forward to continuing to work with the sponsors on Substitute Senate Bill 126 and all of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents and families to ensure Ohio is hazing-free and to end the culture and unfit practice. Thank you, Chair Johnson, for the opportunity to submit written testimony for Substitute Senate Bill 126. If you or any member of the committee have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or the university.