

Testimony to House Criminal Justice Committee on SB 126 on 6/24/21

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to offer testimony in support of Collins Law: Ohio's Anti-hazing Law, named in honor of my son, Collin Wiant. My name is Kathleen Wiant and I'm a Columbus native and mother to 5 children. Two and a half years ago I was awoken in the middle of the night to a knock at the door. I answered to find every parent's worst nightmare. There were 2 police officers and a chaplain there to tell us that our beautiful 18-year-old son, Collin, was found dead at 45 Mill Street in Athens, Ohio. We knew the address immediately. We knew it was the address of Collin's fraternity house. That's all we knew. In the months to follow we began to learn more about the details that led to Collin's death, and we learned that for the last weeks of Collin's life, Collin was beaten, sleep deprived, belted, waterboarded, and he was forced drugs and alcohol. Collin had endured extreme, tortuous hazing.

All of this was done in the name of "brotherhood". With both my husband and I being members of the Greek community we can tell you there is no place in brotherhood or sisterhood for hazing. And there is no place in a civilized society for hazing. Collin's death was senseless, and it was tragic, but what is most painful for me is, IT WAS AVOIDABLE. This bill is about changing a culture where hazing is accepted, and even expected. This bill is about saving lives. We have a culture that dismisses hazing with this "boys will be boys" mentality. It is exactly that mentality that perpetuates hazing. When reprehensible acts like beatings and waterboarding, are dressed up with words like tradition, ritual, brotherhood, or rite of passage, we then, call it hazing. We need to call it what it really is. It's abuse... and it's barbaric.

Each year, 1 ½ million high school students are hazed. At the collegiate level, 55% of students in clubs, teams and organizations are hazed and don't report it, because hazing is only reported 5% of the time. We don't realize how widespread hazing is because the only time we hear about hazing is when there's a death and it makes the news. But what about all the hazing that does not make the headlines? The kids who are traumatized from hazing? Or hospitalized? The kids who become depressed or suicidal because of hazing? The kids who suffer PTSD? The kids who will never be the same person again because of hazing?

We don't want students subjected to the dangers of hazing, and we don't want another family to go through the pain and loss our family has experienced. That is why since Collin's death 2 ½ years ago, I have devoted myself to working closely with Senators Stephanie Kunze, Theresa Gavarone and other legislators, along with a group of stakeholders including prosecutors, police, universities, the North American Interfraternity Council representing 58 national fraternities, and the National

Panhellenic Conference representing 26 national sororities. In collaboration with them we have created model legislation has the potential to make Ohio a national leader in anti-hazing reform.

Last November, Ohio missed an opportunity to pass Collin's Law. When that happened, it was my greatest fear that there would be another avoidable hazing death in the state of Ohio. Sadly, just a few short months later there was. The tragic hazing death of Stone Foltz at BGSU further underscores the importance of getting this bill passed and not have it stall as it did last November.

No family should ever have to go through what the family of Stone Foltz has gone through. No family should ever have to go through what our family has gone through. Let's not have another tragic, unnecessary loss of a beautiful, promising young life.

The Ohio House has a real opportunity to do its part to put an end to hazing. Collin's Law is supported by tens of thousands of students across Ohio who have voiced their opinion in support of Collin's Law. They are sick of hazing, and they are not sitting by and letting it happen anymore. They are the generation who is standing up and saying, "No more hazing!" Now, they they are asking their government leaders to do the same. That is why I stand before you in support of Collin's Law: Ohio's Anti-hazing Law.

When we look at the sad history hazing across the country, we know that every fall there are hazing deaths. What if this fall the next hazing death is once again in Ohio? It is my sincere hope that this Committee will consider these recommendation as it deliberates, and that you will pass this life-saving legislation before students in Ohio head to campus this fall. NOW is the time to pass Collin's Law. Thank you for allowing me to appear before this Committee.