



Senator Theresa Gavarone

2nd Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 126

Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee

March 24, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and the rest of my colleagues on the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for permitting Senator Kunze and myself to speak today on Senate Bill 126, legislation to address the growing problem of hazing in Ohio.

I remember sitting in the Senate Education Committee last year listening to testimony of similar legislation spurred by the death of Collin Wiant. I was heartbroken to hear the testimony surrounding that tragedy and unfortunately we simply ran out of time in lame duck to get that legislation into law.

Earlier this month, Bowling Green State University student Stone Foltz sadly passed away after an alleged hazing incident at an off-campus fraternity event. Two weeks later, my community is still hurting after such a senseless tragedy.

As many of you know, I live in Bowling Green and have since I first arrived to attend and later graduate from Bowling Green State University. Bowling Green is where I met my husband and it is where we decided to raise our three children. The business my husband and I own is located on Main Street in downtown Bowling Green, the church we attend is in Bowling Green, each of my children attended and graduated from Bowling Green City Schools, and my son even attends the university for his undergraduate studies. I served on Bowling Green City Council and have proudly represented the 30,000+ residents of our city in my time in the Ohio House and now the Ohio Senate.

I mention all that to say that Bowling Green means a lot and is a significant part of me and my family. So when I heard about Stone's death, just like my community, I was devastated, hurting and wanted to be part of the solution to the growing problem of hazing-related deaths and injuries within our community and across the state.

Shortly after I learned about the tragedy I thought about the best person to team up with on new legislation and quickly thought about my good friend Stephanie Kunze. She informed me that she had been building upon the work of former State Representative Dave Greenspan and when I asked if she would allow me to work with her on this worthwhile endeavor she graciously accepted.

Senator Kunze did an outstanding job laying out the specifics of the bill, so I won't belabor any of those points besides saying that we need to do something to change campus culture around the issue of hazing. Both Senator Kunze and I are parents of either current or former college students and it is my mission to ensure that no parent has to deal with the life-altering tragedy of losing a child because of a hazing incident. I signed on to this piece of legislation because I believe this bill will get us closer to achieving that goal.

I would like to thank Senator Kunze for allowing me to work on this bill with her and you Chairman Johnson for getting us before this committee to testify so quickly. We would be happy to answer any questions members may have.