

Proponent Testimony of Cory and Shari Foltz on SB 126
Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
May 26, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing us to testify in support of Senate Bill 126, Collins Law, Anti-hazing Law.

This is my husband, Cory Foltz and I am Shari Foltz. We are the proud parents of Stone, AJ and Jersee Foltz.

Our 20 year old, first born son, Stone Justin Foltz died on March 7, 2021, just 3 months ago from a hazing ritual performed as part of an initiation process with the PIKE fraternity at BGSU. A ritual that is passed down year after year, initiation after initiation. We, nor you, can bring Stone back.

Cory and I are here to tell you what happened to Stone and how our lives are forever changed. We want you to hear some of the details so you can have a first hand account of how we believe Stone would be alive today if Senate Bill 126 had become law.

Before I begin . . . To the committee members, I would like you to think of one of your loved ones (son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, niece, nephew) as you listen to our story of how Stone died because **you too** could be impacted by hazing at some point in your life if you haven't already. We never, ever thought it would happen to us either!

In the early morning hours of March 5th, 2021, we received the call that all parents hope and pray they never receive. We were told by the Wood County Sheriff's office that our son was in cardiac arrest and we needed to get to Bowling Green Ohio immediately. I was the one speaking to the officer and knew immediately it was related to some activity Stone had to perform with the fraternity that he had told me about just hours earlier.

I won't take you through the details of the next 96 hours we spent in the hospital as we worked through all the decisions that needed to be made and the heartbreak over and over as we learned that his condition was worsening. Stone had made the brave decision at 16 to be an organ donor - he always thought about others. If any of you have been through organ donation - you know the process is long and hard as Stone's body needed to be prepared and tested constantly for the donation, the viability of each possible organ needed to meet standards and recipient matches across the country needed to be found. Around the clock, careful watch by nurses and doctors

was required to help make Stone's last wish a possibility and we walked proudly beside him on March 8th as we made the hero walk through the hospital to the operating room. We kissed and hugged Stone and told him we loved him deeply and said our final goodbye. We never heard words in return.

As we were in the hospital we had to learn details about how he was hazed over the prior month and how he was taken to a basement blindfolded the night of March 4th and forced to drink excessive amounts of alcohol. Stone's blood alcohol level was .394 nearly 5 times the legal amount. How can that possibly be, I just talked with him?

The details I just shared with you are hard to speak but are necessary to understand why we believe Senate Bill 126 would have saved Stone's life.

Stone reached out to us during his freshman year to tell us he was researching fraternity life. We specifically remember telling him to make sure he was doing his research. After a few weeks he told us he had found two "frats" he for sure would not join because one was big into cocaine and the other one put drugs into young girl's drinks. Stone made the decision that year NOT to join any fraternity and his reasons were that he was not able to find one that did not do illegal drugs and that he wanted to focus on school.

In early February 2021, much to our surprise, Stone told me he was joining a fraternity. We do not know why the quick decision but I made sure to ask him a lot of questions and he provided these answers. He told me the rush process was starting and that he wanted to join because of the networking possibilities. Stone went on to tell me how all the guys in PIKE seemed really nice and he already made many new friends. In fact, he said some of them were from Delaware, Ohio or nearby the area where he grew up. He felt a connection. He also shared this same information with his aunt who had experienced Greek Life. She asked additional questions of Stone and tried to do some research on the BGSU specific fraternities but could not find anything specific about the fraternity that raised any red flags. She too supported Stone and told him to continue to be smart about his decisions.

I referenced earlier that Stone died as a result of a ritual. One that involves excessive amounts of alcohol - a family brand that is passed down to new pledges during each new initiation. This was not a party - it was an organized, repetitive, initiation ritual that the current members themselves had been part of when they were initiated. In our opinion we believe that each year these rituals are becoming riskier as each "big brother" escalates the activity to outperform others.

But here is the deal. Stone thought these guys were his friends because they were soon to be his brothers. He trusted them yet none of these “brothers” were around to help. In fact, they just took him to his apartment, closed the door and left him behind and never saw him again.

For decades kids continue to lose their lives, suffer serious injuries and experience lifelong emotional problems as a result of hazing. Sadly, our story is not unique. The number of messages we have received from people all over this country where victims have suffered from hazing are too numerous to count. These messages are from victims in their 60s to current students and all age groups in between. This is and has been an epidemic and the current laws are not deterring the activities.

Maybe even some of you or your friends were hazed and like these other victims you made it through the trauma. Maybe you haven’t shared the event with anyone. In many cases the impact is life long as the 60 year man shared with us. However, or in the case of our son, Stone or Kathleen and Wade Wiant’s son, Collin they lost their life because of hazing in their simple quest for a brotherhood.

Hazing is abuse, increasing in intensity and riskier activities and when coupled with alcohol has the power to lead to death. Senate Bill 126 can help eradicate hazing from our culture and be a large part of the solution that saves lives.

Education & Transparency

1. The bill provides for more education and even more transparency into hazing incidents on a college campus. Education and transparency helps students and their families make informed decisions about the organizations that positively impact their lives AND the organizations that have a history of illegal and dangerous behavior.
2. Mandatory reporting serves to both encourage reporting of hazing and also deter hazing itself. If fraternity members know they are subject to reporting and discipline they will be far less likely to engage in the behavior. The military academies have successfully done this with cheating. Cheat and you are out, failure to report cheating and you are out. No difference here. Cheating is almost nonexistent anymore in the military academies.

Penalties

1. The penalties are warranted and will, in fact, deter hazing. The opposition claims there will be no deterrence because the brains of 18-22 year old boys aren't fully developed but severe penalties have deterred bad behavior among these kids in other areas. Drunk driving is a good example. While it still exists, there is far less drunk driving because of stiffer penalties. Providing severe consequences for poor behavior has been how kids are parented for ages.
2. If serious harm, whether it is physical or emotional occurs, the consequences should be severe. Hazing is not allowed anywhere. Injuring another human being by engaging in prohibited behavior has always had criminal consequences. There is no good reason for kids who haze another to death or serious injury to receive a slap on the wrist. Stiffer penalties will cause many to think twice before engaging in hazing and will likely give those being hazed more courage to remove themselves from the environment.
3. If hazing causes death or serious injury, these kids need to know their behavior will follow them for a long time just as it does the kids who die or are harmed by hazing and their families who lose loved ones and are forced to live with this forever. Forcing kids to consume an entire fifth of hard alcohol, leading to Stone registering a .394, must have consequences and those consequences must be felt. Stronger misdemeanors for hazing that does not cause death or serious harm are crucial because it is the lesser acts of hazing that lead to more serious and dangerous acts. There is no good reason for allowing hazing in any form no matter how big or small.

In summary, this is not about emotion. We do wake each morning, our hearts break wide open again and again, knowing our son will never come through the doors of our home to give us the hug and kiss on the cheek we so very much want. However, the only reason we are here today is to put a stop to any form of hazing potentially saving lives.

We have searched high and low for any good reason to allow hazing even when it does not cause severe harm and we have found no positive impact from this type of behavior. It is time for laws like this to eradicate a practice that truly has no place in any civilized society.

Please help us keep the promise his mother and I made to Stone on his death bed;

“Stone, we love you and we will fight to the end of our days to help educate and provide visibility to other parents and students about the deadly impacts of hazing. We will do everything we possibly can to keep your memory alive and to never leave anyone behind.”

This bill needs passed now as the current pace at which this is moving increase the risk that we will have another year of uninformed pledging and hazing threatening more young lives and another parent to prepare for a funeral for their young son or daughter. We pray this never happens to you, to anyone you know or to anyone else in this country.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to share our full support of this bill.