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HB 310 Proponent Testimony
Senate Education Committee

Chairwoman Lehner, Vice Chairman Brenner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written comments in support of HB 310.

I would like to present testimony in regard to the hazing provisions included in HB 310. I greatly appreciate the leadership of this committee in addressing the issue of hazing. As you know, HB 310 is named after Collin Wiant, a student at Ohio University who lost his life to hazing during his freshman year.

Through my prosecution of those involved in the events leading up to Collin Wiant's death, I know first-hand of the problems associated with Ohio's current hazing law. The definition is too limiting, the penalties too weak, and the difficulties in mounting an effective prosecution are too great given the weakness of the penalties.

Because of the problems with current law, hazing is generally pursued through other sections of the ORC like assault or, I suspect in too many instances, it may not be pursued at all.

HB 310 imposes tough penalties for hazing, making it more likely that prosecutors will utilize this part of the criminal code in seeking to deter this practice in the future. And just as important, this legislation creates an offense for failure to report hazing which I believe will help to save lives in our state.

HB 310 creates the following hazing offenses and penalties:

- General Hazing – M2 (increased from an M4 under current law)
- Hazing through forced consumption of drugs or alcohol – F3
- Failure to report hazing or threat of hazing – M4
- Failure to report hazing resulting in serious injury – M1

I was part of a stakeholder group that worked with Senator Kunze and Kathleen Wiant to develop additional recommendations on hazing that go even beyond what's in HB 310. While there is little time left in this General Assembly to consider all of those additional recommendations, I know that Mrs. Wiant feels strongly it will save additional lives if the legislature is able to include recommendations Senator Kunze's recommendations that provide for transparency of violations on campuses and for adoption of model anti-hazing policies on campuses.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my support for HB 310.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Keller J. Blackburn", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Keller J. Blackburn
Athens County Prosecuting Attorney