

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Due to the current COVID situation, I am unable to appear in person. However, I am submitting this written statement to support the efforts of Representative David Greenspan to seek passage of this bill.

This statement is in support of House Bill 130. I write it from the perspective of an educator with 50 years of experience across the spectrum from teacher to superintendent and from administrative positions in traditional and community (charter) school environments to over 25 years working with university Greek affairs offices. During my years as a school administrator in several K-12 schools, I have seen firsthand many examples of bullying by both males and females. I have seen bullies prey upon other students in both physical, emotional and now digital ways that have caused the victims irreparable harm including long term emotional and mental health issues. I also serve as an international officer, Grand Trustee, which is a member of the Governing Board of the Sigma Chi Fraternity. In that capacity, I serve on membership reviews and judicial boards which investigate incidents of hazing on college campuses.

Some say bullying has been around forever and is often just brushed off “as a part of growing up”, part of the workplace and other examples of this is just the way it is. A survey conducted between 2014 and 2018 by the Center for Disease Control/Violence Prevention revealed the following statistics:

1 out of 4 teens are bullied

9 out of 10 LGBTQ students experienced harassment at school and online

5.4 million students stay home on any given day because they are afraid to be bullied

1 out of 5 kids admit to being a bully, or doing some kind of “Bullying” property on school

14% of public schools surveyed report that bullying occurs at least once a week

Reports of bullying are highest for middle school (28%) followed by high school (16%) and primary (9%)

1 in 6 high school students report being cyberbullied

Statistics provided by Stop Hazing indicate nearly 47% of students experienced hazing prior to coming to college and that almost 50% of college students involved in campus organizations have experienced some sort of hazing. The following are percentages of students that experienced at least one hazing behavior in these organizations:

Varsity athletics – 75%

Fraternities/Sororities – 70%

Club sports – 60%

All other college organizations – 20% - 50%

The Ohio Revised Code has provisions dealing with bullying/hazing on the books for years with little implementation and enforcement. This bill puts additional enforcement and penalties into the law and raises a greater awareness of the magnitude of the issue.

The environment on many of our secondary schools and university campuses has caused a major change in our social conscience and societal mores. Recent examples of attacks and assaults in our schools have been found to be related to mental health issues, negative personal interactions and the divisiveness existing in America. The changes proposed by this bill seek to make offenders more accountable for their actions and provides for behavioral changes with the community service provisions as part of the consequence for actions. Some critics state the community service and counseling provisions are too

expensive and time consuming to implement. Thought should be given as to what is the residual cost of not implementing the proposed provisions. There is no remediation or behavioral change only a “punishment” and the behavior continues by the perpetrator and the behaviors usually get worse as they get older until there is a tragic or deadly incident and/or incarceration.

The community service component should be a “may” option especially for first offenders so behaviors can be changed early before behaviors become habitual. The bill should have some flexibility to be modified by local districts and universities with programs developed by school based team or professional counselors.

Schools are designed to be centers for learning. Part of the learning process is development of social interaction skills. Community schools especially, strive to develop a sense of community where emphasis is development of the whole child. Generally charter schools are smaller than traditional schools and greater individualization is or should be possible. A bill like HB 130 should encourage a greater commitment to the preventative aspects of bullying and hazing. The rehabilitative aspects of the bill appear to be designed to cause behavioral changes of those with potential for bullying and hazing actions. The costs of the program have to be weighed against the positive potential and preventative nature of future incarcerations. I feel an additional strength of the bill is the inclusiveness of those covered by the bill. It is not limited to just students but the entire educational organization.

Many fraternities have taken emphatic action with anti-hazing initiatives. A comprehensive stand against hazing and programs to prevent hazing supported by consistent consequences/punishments for violations will set the stage for significant change from high school through college. Recently, the National Interfraternity Council (NIC), National Panhellenic Council (NPC), Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors and other groups have joined with Parents United to Stop Hazing (PUSH) to present a concerted effort to stop hazing on the college campuses. PUSH was created by the parents of several students who died due to hazing incidents incurred by their sons and daughters.

I am aware of the recent hazing investigations being conducted at several universities and the temporary suspensions of all fraternities, some sororities and some athletic teams that have been implemented. The blanket discipline action against an entire organization does not deal directly with the individual perpetrators of the offense. Intense investigations should be conducted to identify those involved and discipline should be administered by the university code of conduct and the legal system, as needed. Violators should be expelled from school, not just suspended from organizations and prosecuted to the extent of the law. This should apply to all campus organizations and athletic teams not just Greek organizations.

I know for fact that Sigma Chi and many other Greek organizations have taken a very firm position on bullying and hazing and will expel members for violating the code of conduct. Universities should be consistent and do the same. If I may be of further assistance, I may be contacted by email or cell 330-606-0827.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Hronek, Ed. D

