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**SB 126 Proponent Testimony**  
**Senate Education Committee**

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written comments in support of SB 126.

I greatly appreciate the leadership of this committee in addressing the issue of hazing. As you know, SB 126 is named after Collin Wiant, a student at Ohio University who lost his life 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 are too weak, and the difficulties in mounting an effective prosecution are too great given the weakness of the penalties.

Currently, hazing is a misdemeanor of the fourth degree. This means the primary office responsible for prosecution is city and/or village law directors without the ability to compel testimony through a grand jury. Further, the nature of hazing allows it to exist in a vacuum of secrecy where the public only learns of it through the most tragic of outcomes.

Hazing is a ritual of the past that for too long has been allowed to exist because of tradition and a faulty belief that it builds character. However, in reality, hazing is more akin to creating a weaker society that allows for sexual harassment and discrimination to go under reported and bullies to harass and abuse.

Because of the problems with current law, hazing is generally not pursued, and assailants escape unpunished. Only when the harm that occurs through the direct act of a hazer are so severe do we see prosecutions under other sections of the ORC like assault or, I suspect in too many instances, it may still may not be pursued at all.

However, hazing causes injuries that current law is not able to adequately protect against. For example:

1. Pledges forced to participate in the Oklahoma Drill in a narrow hallway and a pledge's head is spilt open;
2. Pledges forced to swim across the Hocking River late at night in low temperatures in their underwear;
3. Pledges told to cut open their toes and stuff tobacco under the skin;

4. Pledges forced to vomit inside their shirt;
5. Pledges kept in physically strenuous positions;
6. Pledges forced to consume urine of an active member;
7. Pledges forced to consume food concoctions.

SB 126 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 save lives in our state.

SB 126 creates the following hazing offenses and penalties:

- General Hazing – M1 (increased from an M4 under current law)
- Hazing that causes injury – F5
- Hazing that causes serious physical harm – F2
- 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 these criminal penalties. SB 126 creates transparency of violations on campuses and adopts model anti-hazing policies for campuses.

We decided long ago that hazing was a crime in Ohio, now its time we make the penalties commensurate with the harm to society.

Prosecutors support these changes, the North American Interfraternity Conference supports these changes, Ohio's Colleges and University Presidents support these changes, and the Wiants support these changes. Please stand-up and help end hazing; enough is enough.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my support for SB 126.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keller J. Black". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the text.