

Georgia House of Representatives Education Subcommittee on Academic Support

Hearing on HB 659, a bill to reduce college hazing

**Testimony of Joe Gilman, President of HazingPrevention.org**

February 1, 2012

**Introduction**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. My name is Joseph M. Gilman, and I am the Executive Director for Network Operations Quality Management for AT&T, a company that I have served for 37 years. Additionally, I serve as the President of the Board of Directors of HazingPrevention.Org, a non-profit organization founded in 2007. I have been a member of its board since its founding. HazingPrevention.Org seeks to prevent hazing through programming that engages individuals to create environments that allow individuals to associate without hazing and challenge hazing where it is found. Many of our sponsoring organizations are fraternities and sororities.

I am also the Chairman-Elect of the Board of Directors of the Sigma Nu Educational Foundation. I received a B.S. in Mathematics from Morehead State University and a S.M. in the Management of Technology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I live here in Georgia and appreciate the chance to testify today on a measure that I think is important to the future of higher education in the state.

I have been closely involved with the fraternity industry for many years. I co-founded my chapter of the Sigma Nu Fraternity at Morehead State University in 1972 because I was opposed to the hazing I saw taking place at other fraternities on campus and because Sigma Nu was a recognized leader in fighting hazing inside the fraternity world. I am proud to say I have

helped continue that tradition of leadership in fighting hazing in the 38 years I have been involved with Sigma Nu since my initiation. Notably, I served for eight years on the fraternity's national board, culminating in a term as national President, from 2008 to 2010. Sigma Nu believes that its members should live its value of opposition to hazing and this message is delivered through member education and leadership development programming. If incidents of hazing are reported and verified, I can assure you that the fraternity immediately assesses the extent of the hazing and takes actions against individual members or the chapter as a whole. Such actions may range from membership reviews by staff and alumni for the purpose of suspending or expelling guilty individuals to placing the chapter into alumni receivership with the alumni providing extensive guidance and oversight to the chapter's activities. In cases of widespread hazing, the chapter is closed—and I have personally participated in votes necessary to take this action when necessary.

### **Hazing Research and Statistics**

HazingPrevention.Org defines "hazing" as "any action taken or situation created intentionally or unintentionally to members of a group or team, whether new or not and regardless of the person's willingness to participate, that causes embarrassment, humiliation or ridicule, or risks emotional and/or physical harm." HazingPrevention.Org further defines hazing as those actions "done to a person or group of people in order to gain entrance or acceptance into a club, organization, team, workplace, or formal group." Now, having defined hazing, we need to talk about how pervasive it is and what impacts it has on our students today.

First, hazing exists wherever students can be found. While hazing is often categorized as a problem exclusive to fraternities and sororities, hazing has been and continues to be experienced in many other groups, including athletic teams, performing arts groups, military organizations, and honor societies. In addition to its prevalence at the collegiate level, hazing behavior is also seen across student activity groups in high schools. Hazing carries a number of troubling consequences, including endangerment to not only the physical health of students, but also their mental health as well.

Hazing, and its impact, has been studied by a number of researchers including Norman Pollard, Ph.D, Dean of Students at Alfred University, Hank Nuwer, Ph.D., a former member of the HazingPrevention.Org Board, and Elizabeth Allan, Ph.D. and Mary Madden, Ph.D., associate professors at the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development, who created a national center for the study of hazing. In 2008, with the support by more than 30 project partners, Drs. Allan and Madden led a study of over 11,000 students at 53 different colleges and universities across the United States. Their comprehensive study revealed that 55 percent of students involved in clubs, teams and organizations had experienced a form of hazing, and almost 70 percent of students were aware that hazing was occurring on campus. This research further indicated that the percent of students in each activity that experienced at least one hazing behavior ranged from 20 percent of honor society members to 74 percent of varsity athletes.

Second, there is a very clear link between irresponsible or illegal use of alcohol and hazing. Among survey respondents, the most frequently reported hazing behavior was participation in a drinking game, with 26 percent of respondents indicating they had been

hazed in this manner. Drinking large amounts of alcohol to the point of getting sick or passing out was the fourth most commonly reported behavior, with 12 percent of students experiencing this form of hazing. Given that the vast majority of students today are under the legal drinking age, their alcohol use breaks laws and creates a self-reinforcing perception that some illegal activities are implicitly condoned by society simply because you are a student. In my time serving as a leader of HazingPrevention.Org, I am aware of a wide range of hazing incidents in which alcohol has played a role, with forced consumption being common. Such cases sometimes lead to death by alcohol poisoning, but cases of forced overconsumption of water or food causing physical distress have also been reported. Other commonly reported hazing behaviors in Allan and Madden's study included singing or chanting in public, associating with specific people, sleep deprivation, and being screamed, yelled at, or cursed by other group members.

Third, hazing creates a culture of silence that often is condoned by the very adult advisors, coaches and mentors that are best positioned to put an end to these dangerous activities. Perhaps surprisingly, Allan and Madden's study noted that in 25 percent of hazing experiences, students believed coaches or advisors were aware of the activities and in 25 percent of hazing experience, students reported that alumni were present. There have been serious cases of hazing reported in which the fathers of the students hazed were present. These include a paddling ritual following initiation that led to a student with breached blood vessels and emergency medical treatment. Another one involved a requirement by the students wishing to be members to sit by a campfire so long that the polyester work-out pants melted to the legs of one of the students. This perceived acceptance of such behavior by

coaches, advisors, alumni—and even some parents—surely contributes to the lack of reporting of hazing incidents or the failure of students to identify this behavior as hazing. In Allan and Madden’s study, 95 percent of students who labeled their experiences as hazing did not report the event to campus officials.

Fourth, just as with much of the alcohol and drug issues student face, today’s college students often arrive at college already well versed in hazing activities inside their organizations. As a result, students that have already experienced hazing before college are more likely to view it as socially acceptable behavior. Drs. Allan and Madden’s work indicates that 47 percent of survey respondents report experiencing at least one hazing behavior in high school, including 51 percent of the male and 45 percent of the female respondents. This behavior was similarly seen across teams, clubs and groups in the high school environment.

Fifth, students don’t consider much of what they experience to be hazing as defined by the law which makes it difficult to modify their behavior and end the practices. Significantly, 84 percent of those who reported experiencing a hazing behavior in high school do not consider themselves to have been hazed. This persists through college, where nine out of ten students who report experiencing a hazing behavior do not consider themselves to have been hazed. As the study recognizes, there is a clear gap between student experiences of hazing and their willingness to label it as such, confirming that the social acceptance of hazing, like drug and alcohol use, makes it more difficult to combat.

Finally, our need for social acceptance often leads students to endure experiences and actions that violate their values, demean them or jeopardize their physical or mental health. Drs. Allan and Madden’s study also revealed that students surveyed employed a limited

definition of hazing with an emphasis on physical harm, and more frequently cited the perceived positive outcomes of hazing than the negative feelings they associated with the experience. Additionally, Allan and Madden's respondents demonstrated a pattern of denying, minimizing, or normalizing hazing behavior, and a failure to see the power dynamics of coercion at play in hazing situations. These shortcomings are crucial to understanding and implementing more effective strategies to combat the spread of hazing behaviors. The detailed findings of this study indicate that hazing is a widespread phenomenon that affects students across clubs, teams and organizations throughout both secondary school and college, and that more must be done to prevent these harmful incidents.

### **HazingPrevention.Org's Work**

HazingPrevention.Org has a wide range of significant programming efforts going nationwide but I want to focus attention on two of those initiatives. The first is National Hazing Prevention Week, a designated week each year on participating college campuses devoted to increasing dialogue and providing educational programs to address hazing. We are very pleased with the growing number of campuses that recognize this week and use it as a focal point in their respective fights against hazing. The second initiative is the Novak Institute for Hazing Prevention, an inter-disciplinary three-day institute held annually to provide a hazing prevention model based on the research of academic experts. Participants in the Novak Institute have included professionals in student affairs, campus security, fraternity and sorority support staff, and athletics governance. The Novak Institute is giving more people the tools needed to (1) educate students on the ills of hazing; (2) break through the culture of silence

about hazing; and (3) reset the campus norms that consider hazing a rite of passage under any circumstances.

### **Strategies Going Forward**

While prevention strategies and education are seen as the best long-term solution to combat hazing, punitive measures such as those provided for in this bill are necessary in the short term. While it is difficult for me to admit that my own fraternity, which has opposition to hazing as a founding principle, has experienced incidents of hazing, I can attest to the fact that my fraternity's strong position on taking swift punitive action in hazing cases has resulted in a significant reduction in hazing incidents.

One of the worst elements of hazing is that one action can create a cycle of abuse that is hard to break. Dr. Pollard's comprehensive Alfred University hazing study, published in 2000, looked at the hazing culture in athletic teams. The study demonstrated that the impact of hazing lasts well after the incident. Specifically, three out of four students surveyed who reported being hazed also reported one or more negative consequences, and 13 percent either left the group because of hazing or wanted revenge as a result of being hazed. Given this information about both the emotional and physical scars of hazing behavior, it is essential to ensure that this legislation not only addresses the more recognizable physical forms of hazing that result in bodily injury but also takes into account the emotional and psychological incidents and impacts of hazing.

The recent death of Robert Champion, a member of the Florida A&M University Marching 100, has created a heightened level of dialogue in academia, organizational

leadership, and legislatures about the problem of hazing and possible solutions. However, his death, like so many others in which hazing was involved, will be for naught if we do not translate that dialogue into actions such as the imposition of additional punitive measures provided by this bill. Not only does the Board of Directors of HazingPrevention.Org support this bill, its members encourage you to expand the offenses for which a person may be prohibited from enrolling in a Georgia school to include those resulting from participation in hazing actions (e.g., assault). Forty-four states have hazing laws in place—but the number of individuals convicted has been miniscule. It's time for additional punitive actions to be taken against those are convicted of crimes that resulted from hazing actions. We support this bill and urge consideration of an amendment to include offenses related to hazing as reasons to prohibit enrollment in Georgia schools. Thank you.