

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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HB 189: Hazing Sponsor Statement

More than one in ten victims of hazing express a desire for revenge, according to Professor Norm Pollard of Alfred University, who authored one of the first thorough studies of hazing in 1999. Hazing does not stop with the act itself, but engenders more hazing, abuse, and even suicide.

One in five American high school students admits to being directly involved in hazing their peers. Most stories go unreported. Those that surface are reminders of the harsh acts students can carry out on one another. The Juneau Empire reported in December 2008, for example, that Juneau high school athletes returned from a meet with “frostbitten hands and welts on backsides” that were the result of “being ordered to hold onto ice until the skin burned” and “being held down and paddled by a group of students.”

Professor Pollard says that public evidence of hazing usually points to an abundance of similar acts taking place in private. The same vicious cycles that underwrite bullying, harassment, and abuse also perpetuate hazing. Victims in turn haze others—or, worse, act destructively towards themselves. Alaska is one of only six states where hazing is not a crime.

HB 189 defines hazing and expands school district policies to include hazing. The bill prohibits reprisal against witnesses and grants immunity to those who report incidents of hazing in good faith, in order to bring to light the acts that do happen. These provisions already exist in law for harassment, intimidation, and bullying in schools. Our bill extends these sections to hazing. The bill also makes hazing a class A misdemeanor. Acts that result in serious injury or death are class B felonies.

The majority of states have recognized that schools, educators, and communities are together responsible for protecting students from hazing. This bill is a strong step towards ensuring our students are safe.