

Alfred University

April 3, 2013

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
Alaska State Capitol, Room 426
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins,

I want to encourage the Alaska state legislature to pass House Bill 189. When groups employ humiliation and danger to initiate new members into their groups, it becomes hazing. Research has shown the lack of a defined law, corresponding policies, and lack of enforcement all are contributing factors in increasing hazing. Creating a law that specifically makes hazing a crime will enable hazing prevention activities to give Alaskan students a clear understanding of what is acceptable, and what is not.

I became involved in hazing prevention almost fifteen years ago when Alfred University's (my employer) football team was caught hazing the rookie players. It was not clear to the coaches and staff why a group of first year athletes would allow themselves to be bound together and consume alcohol until they vomited, especially since they were trying to become part of the very group that was forcing them to engage in this behavior.

After our hazing incident, we embarked on the first national study of hazing practices amongst National Collegiate Athletic Association college athletes. We found that our incident, and those like it across the country, was not a matter of "boys will be boys," but a desperate desire to be part of a rite of passage initiation. Inductees wanted to prove their worthiness to become part of the group.

Our research found that hazing is pervasive across our college campuses:

- Eighty percent of NCAA college athletes experienced some form of hazing to join a college athletic team.
- One in five was subjected to unacceptable and potentially illegal hazing. They were kidnapped, beaten or tied up and abandoned. They were also forced to commit crimes – destroying property, making prank phone calls or harassing others.
- Half were required to participate in drinking contests or alcohol-related hazing.
- Only one in five participated exclusively in positive initiations, such as team trips or ropes courses.

Athletes most at risk for any kind of hazing for college sports were men; non-Greek members; and either swimmers, divers, soccer players, or lacrosse players. Hazing was most likely to occur in states with no anti-hazing laws and on campuses that were rural, residential, and had Greek systems. Having a Greek system on campus is a significant predictor of hazing, even though non-Greeks were most at risk of being hazed for athletics.

One of the most startling results was that hazing started younger than we thought. Of those athletes who reported they were hazed in college, 42 percent reported that they had also been hazed in high school and 5 percent said they were hazed in middle school. Those results prompted us the next year to undertake a

study of high school hazing. We found 48 percent of high school students who belonged to groups reported being subjected to hazing activities and 25 percent of those were first hazed before the age of 13.

These results were very concerning to us as researchers and should be alarming to you as legislators. Joining groups is a basic human need. Forming a sense of identity and belonging is a major developmental task for teenagers. Children of high school age, however, are just learning to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. They need healthy adult supervision, role modeling, and guidance, without which initiation may easily go awry.

We found that 91 percent of high school students belong to at least one group. Nearly all of them (98%) experienced positive activities as part of joining these groups, and half of them experienced only positive activities. However, we also found:

- Both female and male students report high levels of hazing.
- The lower a student's grade point average the greater their risk of being hazed.
- Almost every type of high school group had significant levels of hazing.
- Even groups usually considered safe haze new members. For example, 24 percent of students involved in church groups were subjected to hazing activities.

Hazing hurts children, emotionally and physically.

- 71 percent of the students subjected to hazing reported negative consequences, such as getting into fights, being injured, fighting with parents, doing poorly in school, hurting other people, having difficulty eating, sleeping, or concentrating, or feeling angry, confused, embarrassed or guilty.
- Dangerous hazing activities are as prevalent among high school students (22%) as among college athletes (21%).
- Substance abuse in hazing is prevalent in high school (23%) and increases in college (51%).

Adults must share the responsibility when hazing occurs.

- Students were most likely to be hazed if they knew an adult who was hazed.
- 36 percent of the students said that they would not report hazing primarily because "There's no one to tell," or "Adults won't handle it right." (27%).

Students do not distinguish between "fun" and hazing.

- Only 14 percent said they were hazed, yet 48 percent said they participated in activities that are defined as hazing.
- 29 percent of students said they did things that are potentially illegal in order to join a group.
- Most students said they participated in humiliating, dangerous or potentially illegal activities as a part of joining a group because those activities are "fun and exciting."

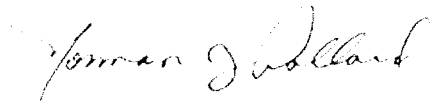
The question that remains is: what can be done about it? Fortunately, since we now know the scope of the problem, we are at a better place than we were ten - twenty years ago. Rather than solely relying on outside speakers to come and present for an hour on the horrors of hazing, we have viable – research based- prevention strategies readily accessible. Anyone wishing to develop a comprehensive prevention plan can do so; but prevention alone is not enough. As evidenced by 44 other states, enacting a state law specific to hazing is an important deterrent.

A critical element in the development of an effective and comprehensive plan is reducing the "contributing factors" for the problem. As mentioned, research has shown the lack of a defined law, corresponding policies, and lack of enforcement are all contributing factors. This bill is an important piece in the development of a comprehensive strategy. A specific hazing statute that is not diluted under the

definition of an already established quasi- related law allows the general public to be fully aware of this horrible and potentially dangerous act of violence. Additionally, knowing that hazing is associated with young people's desires to create a "rite of passage"; your actions will appropriately define hazing behaviors and allow educators, coaches and parents to teach the youth of Alaska better ways to develop meaningful bonding experiences. Your efforts will help reduce this type of needless violence.

I fully and unequivocally support your efforts to enact HB 189.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Norman J. Pollard". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large initial 'N' and a stylized 'P'.

Norman J. Pollard, Ed.D.
Dean of Students