Six states currently do not have laws pertaining to hazing, and of the 44 states that do, the penalties are typically not harsh. After the death of freshman student, Max Gruver, at a fraternity hazing event at Louisiana State University, Louisiana legislators worked to create harsher punishments.

According to news reports, Gruver had been a student at LSU for nearly a month when he was invited to a fraternity pledging event. At the event, pledges were asked questions about the fraternity and required to recite the Greek alphabet. When answered incorrectly, pledges were required to consume liquor. This resulted in pledges drinking copious amounts of alcohol. After being found unconscious the next morning, Gruver was taken to a nearby hospital where he died with a blood alcohol level of 0.495 percent, nearly six times the legal limit.

House Bill 78, commonly known as the Max Gruver Act, was proposed by Louisiana state Rep. Nancy Landry in response to Gruver’s death and in an effort to combat hazing on college campuses.

Before the passing of House Bill 78, hazing was only punishable by a maximum $100 fine and 30 days in jail. The law now states that offenders can be fined up to $1,000 and imprisoned for up to six months, or both. The law also allows for more severe punishments when hazing results in serious physical injury or death. In this case, it is punishable by fines up to $10,000 and imprisonment up to five years. Also, the law creates penalties that hold the overall organization accountable if any leadership was aware of the hazing.

The law went into effect on Aug. 1, 2018.

Gruver was not the only student to die from a hazing incident in 2017. Hazing deaths occurred across the nation at schools in Pennsylvania, Florida and Texas.

Pennsylvania Majority Leader Jake Corman also pushed for new hazing statutes with Senate Bill 1090 in 2017. Current Pennsylvania law only allows hazing to be charged as a second-degree misdemeanor. This bill creates different levels of charges depending on the outcome of the hazing event. If enacted, it would allow harsher punishments for acts of hazing resulting in serious bodily injury or death, making it a third-degree felony. The bill provides accountability for all parties involved including individuals, organizations and institutions.

The Pennsylvania legislation also outlined safe harbor immunities for individuals who seek medical attention to prevent death or serious bodily injury.

“This law, if enacted, will change the landscape in Pennsylvania and hopefully will become the model for states to adopt throughout the country,” said the father of Tim Piazza, a Pennsylvania State University student who died in a 2017 hazing incident, after the introduction of the legislation at the Centre County Courthouse.

Pennsylvania was unable to pass Senate Bill 1090 this session.
As states that have experienced these tragedies remain focused on this issue, many legislators are expected to push for harsher hazing laws in upcoming legislative sessions in order to provide a safer college experience.

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