

James and Evelyn Piazza
Letter to the Board of Trustees of
Penn State University

May 31, 2017

To the Board of Trustees of Penn State University:

As you meet to discuss the future of Penn State in the wake of our Son's death on your campus, we thought we would provide you with our thoughts.

You, the BOT, have a significant obligation to do the right things, not the popular things to appease a small group of Alumni who still do not get it, to make Greek Life and all life safer at Penn State. Our son died on your watch because of ignorance and denial by Penn State.

Yes, he died at the hands of Men who had no regard for human life, but that behavior was fostered and accepted at Penn State for a long time. As I am now learning, Penn State has a long history of harsh hazing, excessive drinking and sexual assaults in its Greek Life. Penn State also has a long history of looking the other way at difficult situations. This must stop and all those who are part of turning a blind eye must be held accountable, just as the individuals who committed the crimes and recklessness should be held accountable. Let us be clear, we are not trying to kill Greek life at Penn State. That is for someone else to decide, the BOT perhaps. Our mission is to make it safer, to the extent Greek Life continues, so families no longer have to worry about their child coming home, being hurt or being sexually assaulted. Greek Life at Penn State is broken and must be fixed. You have an obligation to either fix it or admit that you cannot make it work. Students governing students does not work and claiming there is little you can do is offensive to us and to anyone who seeks safety for their child.

Penn State University failed our son and failed us. As noted, the Administration and its Trustees knew about the problems and the issues but chose to turn a blind eye. If you have not already read the Grand Jury presentment, please read it now. Talk to the Task Force members who are openly talking. It's time to admit responsibility so that the University can move forward. Until that happens the investigations will continue and real change will be impossible. Denial is no longer an option. The Board needs to ask its attorneys to stand down so you can do the right thing. Otherwise the culture of ignorance and denial will live on.

As we have said all along, we would welcome the opportunity to be part of the solution but that can't happen without the BOT's and the Administration's acceptance of responsibility. We can lock arms or we can butt heads as we both move forward. This is completely your choice, not ours. We have stated our preference.

It is time for Penn State to take the lead. The whole country is watching (really the whole world as evidenced by interview requests by several non US media outlets).

If you don't believe it, we welcome you to come to our home to read the many letters, cards, emails, etc. that we have received. Many of these letters are from PSU alumni, Parents of PSU students (including Greek life students) and PSU and other University Greek Life members. You have already seen the interest by the national media and that interest has not waned in the least bit.

The following are some requests in which we believe require your immediate attention and actions.

1. Support us as we work to make law changes in the State of PA and nationally. These changes will include –
 - a. Hazing Legislation similar to Massachusetts – Massachusetts law clearly defines hazing and treats hazing as both a misdemeanor and a felony under certain circumstances and also specifies that anyone who is witness to an incident of hazing and fails to report it to the proper authorities will be subject to criminal penalties along with the perpetrators.
 - b. The Statute of Limitations for Hazing should be extended (possibly up to 10 years).
 - c. A broader Good Samaritan Law which would give an individual the ability to confidently call for help without risk of getting in trouble and the victim not getting in trouble.
2. The University must introduce strict policies and procedures for existence and interaction of Greek Life and must put into place means in which to monitor and strictly enforce such policies and procedures. These policies and procedures should include –
 - a. There should be no hazing, hazing should be clearly defined and at least as rigorous as state and federal laws, and anyone associated with hazing or failing to promptly report hazing will be subject to expulsion from the University.
 - b. There should be no providing of alcohol to underage students at Fraternity parties or rush events and anyone found to be providing alcohol to underage students will be subject to expulsion from the University.
 - c. The University shall have the right and jurisdiction to enter and spot check any of the Fraternities whenever desired and will have the right to inspect all areas of the Fraternity house.
 - d. Any Fraternity which violates the code of conduct as set forth by the University, is subject to immediate loss of recognition as a Fraternity, the Fraternity is subject to a significant fine and any members of the Fraternity will have to vacate the house.
 - e. All Greek Life members must attend an annual University sponsored safety class in order to remain a member in good standing.
 - f. All potential Greek Life pledges must attend a University sponsored safety and orientation class prior to being allowed to pledge.

- g. The University must insert itself with full legal authority to control Greek life, including ownership of housing, enabling monitoring and disciplining fraternal activity.
3. Expel any students that you already know had culpability in our son's death. You know who many of them are (and this includes the woman of Trilogy as well). The Administration has seen parts of the video which already caused the University to permanently ban the Fraternity. Many of the responsible students are clearly identifiable. Inaction against the students is hypocritical. I realize some of the students are children of alumni and prominent business figures in PA, but they committed serious crimes (many of them committed these same crimes for years) and it is on video. What are you waiting for? It is time to act.
4. Fire anyone in the Administration who turned a blind eye to the issues in Greek Life. This starts with Damon Sims. He knew about the problems. He led the Task Force which by its own admission was ineffective. He and his colleagues told us (and other families) at Parents weekend that there was no hazing at Penn State. When many parents of children who were currently pledging spoke out and talked about the hazing the children were facing, the response was "unless the student reports it, it didn't happen". We have letters from other parents telling us the same thing. Again, he (and others) turned a blind eye. Had the Administration listened to these parents, our son would be alive today.
5. Fire Tim Bream – he lived in the Fraternity house as their advisor and he was there the night of this pledge/ hazing event. There is no way he didn't know there was an illegal hazing event with alcohol going on and because he lived there for years, there is no way he didn't know there was a history of illegal hazing and excessive drinking going on (as evidenced by years of video tapes). He had to walk through the lower level of the house every day and as you know the smell of alcohol and vomit does not just disappear and the after effects of the parties doesn't get cleaned up immediately. He turned a blind eye for years. Had he reported this behavior, JUST ONCE, our son's life would have been saved. He is responsible and needs to go! I understand that he is a part of the beloved Football team, but they will survive without him. You must do the right thing, NOW.

We are developing a further list, so please consider the above a starting, not an end point, and we welcome meaningful, impactful changes beyond these suggestions.

Once again, our son died on your watch. We will never see him again because of the Administrations failures to protect him and turning a blind eye to known problems. You now have an obligation to make the appropriate statements and changes to make sure this never happens again. **The world is watching.** Take the lead and do the right thing!

Sincerely,

James and Evelyn Piazza

