

Family Alleges University and Frat Ignored Known Hazing Traditions that Resulted in Son's Death

Baton Rouge, La., August 16, 2018 – Today, the parents of Maxwell (Max) Gruver, the Louisiana State University (LSU) freshman who tragically died from alcohol poisoning as a result of hazing in 2017, filed a federal lawsuit against LSU, the local and national chapters of Phi Delta Theta, the housing corporation that owns Phi Delta Theta's fraternity house at LSU, and members of the fraternity. Max's parents allege the hazing ritual that caused his death would never have taken place if LSU or Phi Delta Theta had responded appropriately to numerous complaints of hazing at Phi Delta Theta's chapter at LSU in the years before Max's death.

The Gruver family alleges in their lawsuit that LSU's and Phi Delta Theta's failure to end the tradition of hazing at the chapter was driven by a broken model of self-governance and outdated gender stereotypes about young men engaging in masculine rites of passage -- in direct violation of Title IX's prohibition of sex discrimination. According to the family's Complaint, because of LSU's policy and practice of treating the hazing of male students less seriously than the hazing of female students, males participating in Greek Life face serious and substantial risks of injury and death, while female students pledging sororities do not. LSU's policy and practice meant that a sorority accused of hazing its pledges by making them sing songs and do sit-ups and putting whipped cream, syrup and eggs in their hair was given "Total Probation" by LSU – the most severe sanction LSU can impose, short of rescinding its recognition of the sorority – while Phi Delt's chapter, which admitted to hazing in 2016, was only placed on interim suspension for a month.

"We refuse to accept that the events that caused Max's death can be explained away as 'boys being boys,'" said Mr. and Mrs. Gruver in a statement. "That notion is deeply offensive and wrong-headed. LSU and Phi Delt knew dangerous hazing was taking place at Phi Delt's LSU chapter for years, yet they continued to allow the chapter and its members to investigate and police themselves. This inaction allowed dangerous hazing traditions at the chapter to persist. We've lost Max as result of those hazing traditions, and his loss has created a devastating impact that reaches not just us, but Max's siblings, family, friends, and all who knew him. Until institutions and national fraternities begin treating the hazing of young men as the serious offense that is, with real consequences for members and local chapters that engage in it, hazing and other dangerous misconduct at fraternities will continue. And each year, more families like ours will have to suffer through these horrific tragedies."

"Every year, and for decades, young men have died or suffered traumatic injuries pledging fraternities that are dangerous, yet glowingly promoted with false and misleading information by the partnerships between fraternities and universities," said Douglas Fierberg, legal counsel for the Gruver family. "A central purpose of this lawsuit is to compel LSU, Phi Delta Theta and other universities to eliminate dangerous hazing traditions, end the killing of young men, and stop lying to students and families who have the right to know information that may save lives."

To learn more about this case and the Gruver's fight to stop hazing, please visit [The Max Gruver Foundation](#).