

SB 1454: “Matt’s Law” – Strengthen Penalties for Hazing.
Introduced Feb. 23, 2006

SUMMARY:

This law stems from the death of Matt Carrington, a 21-year-old student at Cal-State Chico, who died from injuries suffered in an illegal fraternity initiation hazing ritual. Matt grew up in Senator Torlakson’s District.

BACKGROUND:

Matt was left to die of water intoxication on the floor of a cold, wet, sewage-infested basement. He was degraded and mistreated for the last three days of his life, all for the purpose of gaining admission into a fraternity.

Matt died from cardiac dysrhythmia and cerebral edema, or brain-swelling, due to hyponatremia, or “water intoxication.” Hypothermia was brought on by the forced drinking of water, being doused with water, and having fans turned on him in the 40-degree basement of the rogue fraternity.

The fraternity has no national affiliation and had been banned by Chico State in 2002 for alcohol violations. In all, eight persons were charged shortly after Matt’s death. Not all the fraternity members charged, however, were students at the university.

Defense attorneys argued that California’s hazing law – currently in the Education Code – did not apply to the non-students involved in Matt’s death. In addition, California’s hazing law provides only misdemeanor prosecution, with the maximum penalty of just one year in jail.

Matt’s law moves hazing into an appropriate place in the Penal Code, increases penalties to a felony in the event of serious injuries or death, and gives prosecutors authority to bring charges against anyone or any organization involved in hazing. More information is available at www.wemissyoumatt.com.

Sponsor: Matt’s family and friends.

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