



## Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **MA BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION ORDERS REVIEW OF CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT POLICIES**

## *Commends Campus Responses, Prevention Efforts*

FALL RIVER, MA -- Tuesday, October 21, 2014 -- The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) today unanimously approved a resolution directing Higher Education Commissioner Richard M. Freeland and the Department of Higher Education to coordinate a statewide effort among the public colleges and universities to strengthen campus policies around sexual assault prevention, and to review the Board's own guidelines on prevention and response.

At its first meeting of the 2014-15 academic year at Bristol Community College, the Board declared a "zero tolerance" for sexual violence including "stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, harassment and sexual assault, which can have devastating effects on individual victims, as well as serious negative consequences for colleges and universities."

"Our fiduciary and moral responsibility is to develop a system wide policy to address this issue," said Board member Henry Thomas, the University of Massachusetts representative to the BHE.

The Board resolution approved today commended work already underway by the state's community colleges, state universities and the University of Massachusetts to make sure that campus policies remain in compliance with federal law, given recent regulatory amendments.

The Board also heard today from representatives of three campuses - Massasoit Community College, Fitchburg State University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst - who shared recent experiences in responding to alleged instances of sexual assault and examples of their proactive efforts to prevent further violence on campus.

Massasoit Community College President Charles Wall detailed the campus' recent response to two alleged sexual assaults, including Massasoit's deployment of a crisis leadership team and extensive use of social media to alert the campus community of the threats prior to arrests by police.

"Members of the crisis team fanned out across the campus, handing out campus safety leaflets, offering escorts and just talking with students," Wall told the Board. "Students felt it was an invitation for them to come forward if they had a problem and they thanked us for making them feel more secure."

Administrators and staff from Fitchburg State University outlined their FAVE (Fitchburg Anti-Violence Education) prevention program, which has a 100% participation rate among students as a result of mandatory trainings.

"I have been a part of FAVE for all four years and am now an orientation leader," said Fitchburg's Nathan Gregoire, a FSU senior and a voting member of the Board of Higher Education. "Every time I lead a FAVE training I find it creates a caring atmosphere on campus. Students let us know that they feel they know what to do when an assault happens."

Enku Gelaye, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and Campus Life at the University of Massachusetts Amherst said that UMass is also mandating bystander training because research shows that despite resources available to victims, they will turn first to peers.

"That makes it essential to train our students so that they know how to lead friends to the extensive resources that we have available," said Gelaye.

As part of its directive to Commissioner Freeland, the BHE asked for a review of a 2008 report entitled *Campus Violence Prevention and Response: Best Practices for Massachusetts Higher Education*, to ensure it adequately addresses campus prevention efforts and response to sexual assault. The Commissioner will report back to the Board by December with the findings of that review, including any recommended changes to best practice going forward.

"I commend the Board for making this critical issue one of its main priorities for this academic year," said Freeland. "We will approach our work with urgency, given how important this matter is to our students, affecting both their sense of security and their ability to learn."

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