Dear Students,

Many in our university community are hurting. Last weekend’s allegations of a sexual assault activated an impassioned outpouring of support and public sharing of similar experiences by other students. The peaceful protests made it clear that there is a deep sense of anger, frustration and unease with what many of our students see as a pervasive culture of sexual assault on our campus.

I write to you today to acknowledge and thank those who have spoken out about their trauma and those who stand with them in solidarity: We hear you, we see your pain, and we are committed to doing better.

While the university stands unequivocally with survivors and is committed to investigating all allegations of sexual assault, as the events of the past few days clearly demonstrate, we commit to identifying the support, outreach, and reporting tools that are most effective in meeting the needs of our community.

We also recognize the events of the past few days may trigger those students previously impacted by relationship or sexual violence.

Today, I want to share some information regarding:

- Services and supports available to members of the UMass community
- Plans to partner with sorority and fraternity community members who want change
And a request for feedback about how and where we can do better

Services Available

**Sexual Assault Support & Advocacy Services (SASA) at CWC**

*SASA serves as the Rape Crisis Center for all of the residents of Hampshire County and is situated on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. SASA supports people of all genders who have been impacted by sexual violence with our free and confidential services.*

As our community continues to address and discuss sexual violence, it is important that anyone impacted by violence know that they are not alone and we can provide support.

**SASA Services Include:**

- **24/7 Sexual Assault Support & Advocacy (SASA) Hotline** The 24/7 SASA Hotline is available to provide emotional support, information, and resources for survivors of violence as well as their friends/family/support networks. The hotline can support survivors immediately after a sexual assault or even years later.

- **Advocacy Services** The 24/7 SASA Hotline can also provide information and connect survivors with a SASA advocate.

*Medical Advocacy* – SASA advocates are available to support survivors through a SANE exam (collecting evidence of an assault) as well as other medical needs related to sexual violence. An advocate can accompany survivors to Cooley Dickinson Hospital and University Health UMass Health Services.
Police, Court and Conduct Advocacy – SASA advocates can support survivors reporting an assault. An advocate can accompany a survivor to police departments, court, and college conduct processes.

- **SASA Counseling**
  
  *Walk-in* By arrangement, SASA offers a private counseling room with a computer for walk-ins to meet with our sexual assault support and advocacy staff.  
  
  *Ongoing*– SASA counselors provide short-term peer counseling.

- **Support Groups** – Support groups are offered on a range of topics – including groups for survivors and others impacted by trauma.

If you have suggestion for additional support services, or wish to provide feedback on any of the available services, please [submit feedback on SASA services](#).

**Concerns in our Community, Next Steps**

Many members of the community have called for the immediate adoption of the Survivors’ Bill of Rights, a framework of caring for and responding to issues related to sexual violence on campus. Last semester we began working with leaders in the Student Government Association to review the Survivors’ Bill of Rights and align it with federal Title IX laws to facilitate adoption. This effort is still underway.

While issues and concerns related to a culture of sexual violence at the university is not limited to the sorority and fraternity community, a perception exists for some that these organizations are permissive and responsible. I have heard from leaders of the sorority and fraternity community who are equally concerned about this culture and are committed to acting on systemic change. The university will partner with these students and work with a consultant who specializes in sexual assault prevention within Greek-letter organizations.
If you have suggestions for additional trainings, workshops, or wish to provide feedback on existing plans, please submit feedback on concerns in our community and next steps.

Reporting

The decision to report sexual assault or violence is a deeply personal one, and the university respects survivors’ wishes to decide when, how, and to whom they disclose information. In recent days, students are sharing the barriers they faced in reporting incidents and we must address this situation. Reporting options must be as accessible as possible for all members of our community so if they choose to report, the path forward is clear.

If you want to report a sexual assault, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity or the UMass Police Department:

- **Report to the Equal Opportunity office at UMass Amherst**
- **Contact UMPD** at 413-545-2121, or dial 911

If you are seeking confidential information but do not want to make a police report, you may call the:

- Center for Women and Community 24-Hour Crisis Hotline at 413-545-0800
- University Health Services Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Phone: 413-577-5000

If you have suggestions for changes and modifications to our reporting structures or wish to provide feedback on existing reporting tools, please submit feedback on our existing reporting structures.

Allegations shared online and in recent media articles related to the events of last weekend have ignited deep concern, outrage, and sadness. We want to channel this energy into something that makes UMass Amherst better for all students. I invite you to
share your perspective on how we might improve educational prevention, outreach and support services for the community. I know with your help we can and will do better.

Thank you, and take care.

Brandi Hephner LaBanc
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