To: Members of the Task Force

From: President Eric J. Barron

Re: Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Task Force Charge

Thank you for your willingness to serve on a University-wide Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Task Force. Below please find an outline of the charge, which is being distributed to the entire University community in the hopes of input from every area. I welcome comments from all.

The issue of sexual assault and sexual violence on college and university campuses, along with sexual or gender-based harassment more broadly, has been in the national spotlight. We at Penn State are committed to providing a safe campus environment and we encourage this national discussion. We have no greater priority than the safety of our students, faculty and staff. Over the years and in myriad ways, Penn State has undertaken many important institutional efforts to address the urgent problem of sexual violence on college campuses, including our own campuses. Our efforts have included preventive and educational awareness programming, the creation of policies and procedures for responding to complaints of sexual harassment and sexual assault, and provisions for counseling and other services to assist survivors of sexual violence. We also have multiple reporting systems, we investigate complaints, we coordinate with the police and other criminal authorities, and we provide remedies and appropriate sanctions. Through all of these activities we have made changes and improvements in our policies and practices to assist those impacted by these behaviors. We also have implemented lessons learned from experience, adopted professional advice and expertise, engaged in best practices and fulfilled all external compliance obligations.

As the next step in this critically important University-wide effort, I am charging the Task Force on a comprehensive basis to collect, review and provide an evaluation of Penn State’s activities relating to sexual assault and other forms of sexual or gender-based harassment. After undertaking this review and analysis, the Task Force should make any and all recommendations it believes are appropriate to ensure that our programs,
policies and practices for addressing the problem of sexual violence in our community are as effective and strong as possible. In formulating your recommendations, I also ask that you monitor new federal guidance and regulations, review best practices that may be developed at other institutions, and draw on the expertise of professionals who work in this area, many of whom are here at Penn State (including a number of you).

Without limiting the scope of the Task Force’s work, I ask that you pay special attention to programmatic efforts to educate our community about sexual assault and sexual violence more broadly (including its causes and the great individual harm that results). In addition, please also look at University and other resources available to survivors, reporting avenues and obligations, how best to protect the wishes and — where appropriate and possible — the confidentiality of the survivors. I also ask that you consider improvements in our investigation and hearing practices and procedures, and efforts to strengthen the coordination and oversight of all of our efforts on a University-wide basis. In that connection, please consider whether you would advise that the University establish a permanent oversight committee to review and help implement on an ongoing basis University policies and best practices related to sexual harassment and assault across all units and campuses of Penn State.

Penn State does not tolerate sexual and gender-based harassment and violence in our University community. We will educate the University community about these issues and our rights and obligations as members of the community. We will protect from retaliation any individuals who bring forth concerns, for themselves or others. We will protect the identity and confidentiality of victims to the maximum extent allowed by law. We will investigate and take forceful and effective action against perpetrators of sexual violence wherever appropriate and possible, while also recognizing that all parties are entitled to the benefits of all processes and procedures the University and the law afford. In all of these efforts, we are committed to addressing and responding to the serious and challenging societal problem of sexual violence in college and university communities, including at Penn State, in the most effective and appropriate way we know.

These are difficult issues with sometimes conflicting interests. There are no easy answers. However, there is nothing more important than the safety of the members of the Penn State community, so I thank you again for taking on this very important mission.
The University will support your work with all necessary resources, so please call on whatever support you need.

President Eric J. Barron