

Senate Higher Education Committee  
Legislative Hearing on Campus Sexual Assaults

December 12, 2016

Testimony on behalf of Ramapo College of New Jersey c/o:

Peter P. Mercer, L.L.B., Ph.D., College President, ex officio of the Board of Trustees

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Thank you Madam Chair, and Senators, for convening such an important discussion. I am Peter Mercer, president of Ramapo College of New Jersey. I am joined today by my colleague Melissa Van Der Wall, Dean of Students and one of Ramapo's Deputy Title IX Coordinators.

In 2015 I testified before you that sexual violence was one of the most important issues that we faced in higher education across the country and here at home. That remains true today.

I come to this issue not only as a College President, but as a father. As parents we agonize from the minute our children are born on how best to prepare them for the world outside the safety of our homes. It is clear to me that our students, our children, are grappling with issues of sexual violence long before they arrive on our collective college doorsteps. Their mores are well-developed, as are their ideas about consent and their definitions of sexual violence.

Over the past two years my colleagues and I at Ramapo College have engaged in a number of related student-centered programs, trainings and policy reforms to address sexual violence. As some of you may be aware, we also commissioned two independent reports aimed at strengthening our sexual assault prevention and education policies and practices, and we made those reports available in their entirety to the public. Born from those independent reports, Ramapo College developed an action plan titled *Ramapo: Advance*.

I am here today to share with you that the College's progress under *Ramapo: Advance* is substantial. We continue to hold culpable perpetrators accountable. We continue to support victims and survivors. And we are investing significant time and resources to changing a culture that too often victimizes our daughters and sons.

To summarize, briefly, the initiatives in *Ramapo: Advance* included:

- Enhancing our Title IX infrastructure with specialized training for investigators.  
This has been completed.

- Creating a centralized website with clearly-written information on how to report an incident, links to current policies and on- and off-campus resources. This has been completed.
- Updating and/or strengthening the College's Bystander Intervention and Sexual Assault training programs and its Sexual Misconduct Policy. This has been completed and I will ask Dean Van Der Wall to provide you with more detail on these fronts.
- In addition to these initiatives, *Ramapo: Advance* also committed the College to strengthening its reporting infrastructure for sexual violence under Title IX and the Clery Act. This has been completed.
- Ensuring that confidential health, counseling, athletic training, and pastoral resources are available on campus to serve as confidential victim advocates. This has been completed.
- Updating our MOU with Law Enforcement Authorities to inform them of the College's required responses under federal law. This is ongoing and we are grateful for the iterative input, counsel, and support we have received from the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office and the Mahwah Police Department.
- Holding routine debriefing meetings consisting of leadership from Residence Life, Student Conduct, Counseling Services and Public Safety to review reporting and enforcement activities. These meetings are ongoing and Dean Van Der Wall is at the center of them.
- The College also made additional public safety investments, including a commitment to increase the number of Public Safety Officers on campus, and enhanced community policing and enforcement training. This has been completed.
- We committed to increasing training for faculty, staff and student leaders as they are on the front lines and likely resources for victims, survivors and their supporters. This has been completed.
- Development of a mobile anonymous reporting system as a complement to our long standing Good Samaritan Policy, which empowers students to do the right thing and seek medical attention for themselves or others without the fear of disciplinary outcomes. This is underway and we plan to launch a mobile app for reporting later this academic year.

We will not allow the grim nature of this effort to deter us. As we continue our work we appreciate the support and leadership of this committee, and our community partners in law enforcement and rape prevention.

With that, I thank you all for your attention and turn now, with the Committee's approval, to introduce Dean Van Der Wall.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter P. Mercer".

Peter P. Mercer, L.L.B., Ph.D.

College President, *ex officio* of the Board of Trustees