Public Safety and Security Task Force provides update to PASSHE Board

A task force created at the direction of the chairman of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education’s Board of Governors to help ensure PASSHE universities provide the safest campus environments possible is continuing to review university police and security operations.

The creation of the Public Safety and Security Task Force was announced in April by Board Chairman Guido M. Pichini. It was charged with reviewing all aspects of campus safety and security, including crime trends, current funding and staffing levels, reporting compliance, staff training, student safety education, threat assessment, university policies and any other factors deemed appropriate.

The membership of the task force, which is chaired by Board member and Delaware County Sheriff Joseph F. McGinn, comprises a broad representation of both internal and external constituency groups, many of whom have years of experience in police operations. To date, the task force has met four times.

McGinn provided an initial update on the group’s efforts to the Board of Governors at its meeting today, highlighting a series of statistics that indicate the overall safety of the 14 PASSHE campuses.

“Based on statistics provided as part of the Uniform Crime Report, which is produced annually by the Pennsylvania State Police, we already know that our campuses are among the safest locations in the Commonwealth,” Mr. McGinn said.

According to the latest information included in the UCR, PASSHE universities experience 70 percent fewer Part 1 – or serious crimes – than the state average; and, in some areas of the state, the on-campus crime rates are 1/10th that of the overall region. Crimes involving the use of weapons, including firearms, are among the lowest of all incidents reported; and, overall, the number of serious crimes being committed on PASSHE campuses is half of what it was in 1986, and is continuing to decline.

PASSHE universities spend a combined $20 million a year on law enforcement and security. They employ about 200 police officers and an additional 55 trained security guards.

“Our officers must pass the same or even more stringent certification requirements as other police officers in the Commonwealth,” Mr. McGinn said. “Our departments work closely with the municipal police departments in their communities and with the State Police to provide for the safety and security of our students, staff and campus visitors.

“While our campuses already provide safe, secure living and learning environments, it is
important that every effort be made to ensure they remain that way."

The task force has engaged in “very serious discussions on these very important issues,” Mr. McGinn said. “At the conclusion of our review, the task force will make a series of recommendations on ways the campuses can enhance their efforts to best ensure the safety and security of students, staff, and campus visitors in the most cost-effective manner for the universities and PASSHE.”

Several additional meetings of the task force are planned. Anyone who would like to provide input into the review may contact task force members by going to the PASSHE website at www.passhe.edu <http://www.passhe.edu> and clicking on the link to a special webpage that has been created.

“We encourage everyone’s involvement in this process,” McGinn said. “This is a serious matter for everyone involved, not just for the task force, but for the Board of Governors and for our university communities. Clearly, ensuring our campuses are as safe as possible is paramount to all that we do.”

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, with about 115,000 students. The 14 PASSHE universities offer degree and certificate programs in more than 120 areas of study. About 500,000 PASSHE alumni live and work in Pennsylvania.

The state-owned universities are Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania. PASSHE also operates branch campuses in Clearfield, Freeport, Oil City and Punxsutawney and several regional centers, including the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg and the Philadelphia Multi University Center in Philadelphia.