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UMass Amherst Releases Independent Review of Residence Hall Security, Will Adopt Measures to Strengthen Campus Safety

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AMHERST, Mass. – An independent review of residence hall security at the University of Massachusetts Amherst affirmed the university's longstanding commitment to continuous security improvements while recommending a comprehensive set of measures to further strengthen the safety of residence halls.

Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy said, "Student safety and security is our top priority. While this report concludes that our residential security program ranks favorably with comparable universities, more needs to be done. We are committed to implementing improvements and making our residence halls even safer."

The university will spend an estimated \$2 million over three years to address top-priority recommendations covering guest registration, physical layout of residence halls, and access, key control and alarm monitoring. In addition, the campus will hire a third party to conduct a Clery Act compliance assessment to ensure the university is meeting all crime reporting and timely warning standards.

The report was commissioned by UMass Amherst Police Chief John Horvath following the alleged October 2012 rape of a student in the victim's residence hall. The four men charged in the case were not UMass students. Horvath noted that based on the consultant's initial findings, immediate improvements were instituted this summer and fall including correction of door deficiencies, expanding the role of police cadets to patrol common areas, and more complete and timely reporting of incidents.

The study, conducted by Business Protection Specialists of Canandaigua, N.Y., commended the university for a longstanding commitment to student safety, stating that "UMass is a leader in terms of the investments the university makes in residence hall security."

A student survey conducted by the consultant showed that 95 percent of those surveyed said security is a high priority for Residential Life and the UMass Police, and 92 percent believe security in residence halls is appropriate.

Overall, BPS made 87 recommendations in a 214-page report. Horvath said he and other campus officials must spend more time assessing all the suggestions. The top 16 recommendations included:

- **Guest registration:** personal computers for residence hall security monitor desks; software for visitor management and improved enforcement of judicial bans and trespasses, to be piloted in a residence hall next month; panic alarms at residence hall security monitor desks.
- **Residence hall layout:** classroom management; stairwells at main entrance; food service access control; public restrooms; general lobby weaknesses; securing residence halls from residential service desk traffic.
- **Access, key control and alarm monitoring:** rectify door hardware deficiencies; nuisance alarm remediation, steps 1 and 2; door abuse enforcement; replacement of video cameras; ID card validation, using software rather than stickers on cards; correction of weaknesses with fire exits that are equipped as egress fire doors.

Horvath said BPS' recommendations provide excellent guidance. In regard to the top 16 recommendations, the chief said he agrees with 14, with further evaluation required on the best timetable to upgrade video cameras and the usage of panic alarms at security desks.

UMass Amherst has the third-largest on-campus residential population in the country, housing more than 13,000 students in 51 residence halls. BPS found the campus "has a long track record of monitoring security performance and making adjustments to correct identified weaknesses. This track record of continuous improvement has been a longstanding tradition and continues in 2013."

Security program strengths identified by BPS include:

- Locking residence halls 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Few similarly sized universities are employing this security practice.
- Investment of more than \$1.2 million in electronic access control to move away from mechanical locks and keys for building entry, which improves control of access to buildings and the monitoring of activity through swipe-card records.
- The installation of more than 1,000 video cameras on campus, including 389 in residence halls, which deter illegal activity and provide forensic support with 30 days of recorded video. "UMass has some of the highest camera counts of all universities surveyed."
- Providing more than 112,000 hours of security staffing at residence hall desks for access control during duty hours, which generally start at 8 p.m. and

end between midnight and 3 a.m. on different nights. "Some similarly situated universities do not employ such controls and therefore have little control over who may be admitted to residence halls."

- "Consistent commitment by Residential Life leadership to fund requested security improvement for the residence halls."

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