

University Relations: Regents call for UW System to develop more robust policies to safeguard against sexual harassment

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Changes to hiring, reference check policies will be considered

MILWAUKEE – The Board of Regents unanimously approved a resolution today calling for University of Wisconsin System to develop or modify certain human resources policies to ensure more robust hiring and reference check processes related to sexual harassment be implemented at all UW System institutions.

“The board has a paramount responsibility to ensure the safety of our students and our employees at every institution. We will work closely with Governor Walker – who has rightly called on us to take action – and his administration to find uniform standards in alignment with state practices,” said Regent Vice President Drew Petersen, who introduced the resolution. “When those policies and procedures are being structured, the end result must ensure that employee misconduct at one UW System institution cannot be hidden as they seek to work somewhere else within UW System.”

Recent reports that allegations of sexual harassment by a UW employee at one institution were not shared with another UW institution as part of a reference check for employment revealed a gap in current practices, prompting the swift review.

UW System President Ray Cross and Board of Regents President John Robert Behling and Vice President Petersen recommended last week that the Board take up the issue.

In calling for the relevant policies to be developed without delay, President Cross reiterated that “the UW System has zero tolerance for sexual harassment, and there is no room for compromise on that commitment.” Cross anticipates policies will be brought before the Board at its meeting in August.

The resolution calls for UW System to consider policies that will require all UW institutions to share the personnel files of current or former employees with other UW institutions or Wisconsin state agencies as part of a hiring review.

Recommended policies will also require that UW System institutions appropriately document any allegations or investigations of sexual harassment in an employee’s personnel file. These personnel files must also appropriately document the final resolution of any allegations or investigations, including whether the employee was found not responsible, resigned, was disciplined, or was terminated.

Hiring and reference check processes at all UW System institutions also will be reviewed to assure that allegations or investigations of sexual harassment for current or former employees are appropriately disclosed when an individual is being reviewed for employment by a UW institution or by an outside entity.

The UW System put forth a comprehensive new Board of Regents’ sexual assault and harassment policy in 2016, codifying the UW System’s commitment to address the issue, mandating training for all employees and students.