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## COVID-19 Campus Update, May 19, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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COVID-19 Campus Update – May 19, 2021

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

We have seen several changes in government guidance involving the wearing of masks; that continues to be the focus of attention for many people in our community. I will have more on that and other related items later in this message. Today, however, I begin with an update on the University's response to the lawsuit filed on behalf of 11 women regarding the University's handling of sexually assaults several years ago. The University's initial response was filed with the Court today.

As I have stated publicly, these allegations are serious and disturbing and concern me deeply as your President.

A great deal of work and fact-finding has taken place in preparing the University's response. Consistent with our practice throughout this case, we will not engage in a public recitation of the specific elements of this response. However, I do want to provide an overview of the response to key elements of the lawsuit:

Most importantly, our response does not dispute or challenge any survivor's allegations that they suffered a sexual assault on our campus. We will not question the bravery of the survivors for coming forward to tell their stories, and we are absolutely committed to our students' safety at Eastern. We can honor the survivors' bravery and encourage others to report sexual assault on campus, while making the legal points we need regarding our Title IX responsibilities.

Criminal proceedings for the actions described in the lawsuit continue against three suspects charged in these cases. We believe the criminal system is an appropriate place for this to be addressed.

Secondly, we strongly deny that the University engaged in any manner of cover-up as alleged in the lawsuit. As we stated when the lawsuit was filed, the University can only act on information it has been presented.

Of the 11 cases brought forth in the lawsuit, the University was only made aware of two of them while the survivors were students at Eastern. And, following the wishes of the survivor in one case and in the other her wish to remain anonymous, the University was not able to pursue an investigation in either.

I reiterate that we stand by and strongly support all survivors of sexual assault. How and when to pursue investigations can be complicated choices made at varying points in time by survivors. They should be given power over their experiences and how they are shared. This must be reflected in the University's actions and policies. There is no place for sexual violence on our campus and we will always take swift action to stop it

when we learn it has occurred. We stand ready to support survivors in completing their education safely and without further trauma on our campus.

Last fall (Sept. 25, 2020), the University announced that it engaged the external firm of [Cozen O'Connor](#), with which the University had no prior relationship, to review and audit our Title IX and related policies, procedures, and actions regarding these events. Cozen O'Connor is nationally renowned in the area of Title IX investigations, and the two principals engaged in the EMU work are both former prosecutors working in the areas of family violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. The report, when completed, will be shared with the campus community. We will undoubtedly be given recommendations about where we can do better – and we will address those head on.

The University seeks to learn every detail about the handling of cases that are the subject of the lawsuit. We want to know whether our processes related to these cases were followed and, if not, why and what steps should be taken so that our students are protected and feel supported in reporting sexual assault. I want to emphasize: we are committed to full transparency.

Protecting students is critical to the University's educational mission. I can say, from careful personal observation, that our staff in law enforcement, Title IX, student affairs, and elsewhere work tirelessly to try to create a safe and supportive environment for students, faculty and staff. It is clear that more needs to be done.

If you have any information or wish to report any incident of sexual assault or misconduct, please contact EMU Police at 734-487-1222 or at [dps\\_questions@emich.edu](mailto:dps_questions@emich.edu), or file an incident report with [the EMU Title IX Office](#).

### Centers for Disease Control/State of Michigan face mask guidelines

As noted in my message to campus on Monday, we continue to monitor the face mask guidance in light of announcements by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of Michigan to relax outdoor face mask policies for all individuals and indoor face mask policies for individuals who have received a COVID-19 vaccine.

As of this writing, EMU's face mask policies remain unchanged. Everyone on campus is still required to wear a face mask that covers both the nose and mouth in or on all University buildings and grounds (indoors and outdoors). The University's Public Health Work Group and the Safe Return Steering Committee are currently reviewing our practices in light of the changing circumstances. We will provide an update to our policies in the near future.

### Vaccinations Update

The changing guidelines for wearing face coverings are largely the result of the increasing numbers of people who are vaccinated against COVID-19. However,

according to the State of Michigan, less than 45% of eligible residents in the state have completed the vaccination process. There is much more work to be done to ensure everyone's safety. Please get vaccinated, if your health permits. Sites are easy to find and most now offer walk-in vaccinations.

### COVID-19 Testing Center Schedule

COVID-19 testing is encouraged even if you are fully vaccinated. While being vaccinated limits the symptoms of COVID-19, vaccinated individuals may still be carriers and inadvertently spread it to friends and family.

The Testing Center is located in the lower level of the Student Center (next to the Bookstore). It is open the following dates and times:

- Tuesday, May 25: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 26: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Closed the week of May 31
- Tuesday June 8: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Wednesday June 9: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Tuesday June 15: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Wednesday June 16: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Tuesday June 22: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Wednesday June 23: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Tuesday June 29: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Wednesday June 30: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Visit the [testing website](#) to review the Center's schedule, as hours are subject to change.

I thank you for your work on behalf of the University and support of the #EMUSafe initiatives. Continue to follow the [University's COVID-19 Planning and Preparedness website](#) for ongoing updates.

James Smith, Ph.D.