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House Passes Bill Establishing Campus Climate Surveys at Higher Education Institutions

Surveys promote safer campuses with published results; expert task force to oversee the effort

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) joined his colleagues in the House to pass legislation requiring Massachusetts higher education institutions to conduct surveys assessing the campus climate relative to sexual misconduct every two years.

With the goal of fostering safe and inclusive campus environments, the surveys – known as campus climate surveys – will assist institutions with gathering sexual misconduct data, including the number of incidents of misconduct as well as provide information about student awareness of campus policies and procedures, and help campuses identify at-risk groups.

“Massachusetts is home to thousands of college students and this bill will promote safer campus life and build transparency into the reporting of occurrences of sexual misconduct at institutions across the Commonwealth,” said Representative Smola.

The legislation requires universities and colleges use model surveys based on the recommendations provided by a 21-member task force, which is co-chaired by the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Commissioner of Public Health.

The task force is charged with developing a model climate misconduct survey based on peer-reviewed research for statewide distribution to higher education institutions. Its members include the Attorney General, the Secretary of Public Safety and Security, representatives of rural and urban rape crisis centers, the Victim Rights Law Center, Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth, public and private higher education institutions,

survey analysis researchers, and students. The task force is due to complete its work by March 31, 2019 and the legislation would take effect on Aug. 1, 2019.

The legislation requires that the surveys are anonymous with no identifying information collected and that the results be published on institution websites 120 days after the completion of the survey. Under the legislation colleges and universities may use their own campus-specific surveys if approved.

The bill now moves to the Senate for its consideration. For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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