

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education Announces Inaugural Members of Campus Sexual Assault Commission

Building on a commitment to ensure all New Jersey campuses are safe and inclusive spaces for college and university students, the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) today announced members of the Campus Sexual Assault Commission that began meeting last week. The state established the Commission by way of [P.L. 2019, c.299](#) to implement recommendations from the New Jersey State Plan for Higher Education working group on Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments and to further the work of the Task Force on Campus Sexual Assault.

“Every student in New Jersey should feel safe and supported as they pursue a high-quality credential, and this Commission is one of the strategies that will help ensure that students are heard,” **said Dr. Brian Bridges, Secretary of Higher Education.** “A campus culture that promotes connectedness improves the sense of belonging and encourages persistence toward earning a degree, particularly for LGBTQ+, minority and first-generation college students. I look forward to working with this Commission as we seek to make New Jersey’s college campuses safer spaces for all students.”

The Commission’s work is focused on studying and evaluating emerging issues, policies and practices concerning campus sexual assault; monitoring progress and offering technical assistance to institutions of higher education in implementing campus climate surveys; and developing institution-specific action plans responsive to the issues and needs identified through the campus climate surveys.

“An alarming and disturbing percentage of graduate and undergraduate students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, according to the Rape Abuse Incest National Network,” **said Assemblywoman Annette Quijano (D-Union).** “We need to do more to reduce incidents of sexual violence, starting with assessing how allegations are investigated, holding abusers accountable and ensuring survivors have the support they need. The important work of the Campus Sexual Assault Commission (CSAC) will be instrumental in guiding the legislature’s response to this critical issue.”

“We’re glad the Commission that we first imagined back in 2017 is now actively working to develop plans to combat the epidemic of campus sexual assault,” **said Senate Republican Leader Tom Kean (R-21),** a prime sponsor of the law creating the Campus Sexual Assault Commission. “This is an important step in ensuring that our college campuses are a secure place where students can learn and grow without fear.”

Inaugural members of the Campus Sexual Assault Commission include:

- **Ashante’ S. Connor**, Title IX Coordinator, William Paterson University
- **Donna Chiera**, President, American Federation of Teachers New Jersey (AFTNJ)
- **Marina Ford**, Student, Rutgers University
- **Marissa Marzano**, Communications Manager, New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- **Kat McGee**, Director of Title IX, ADA, and Compliance Training, Ramapo College

- **Dr. Sarah McMahon**, Associate Professor, Rutgers University and Director, Center on Violence Against Women and Children
- **Frank Merckx**, Vice President of Campus Life and Student Affairs, Drew University
- **Evelyn Padin**, Attorney, Law Office of Evelyn Padin
- **Dr. Sheetal Ranjan**, Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, William Paterson University

Additional members from OSHE, the Department of Children and Families, and the Office of the Attorney General also hold seats on this Commission.