To the MSU campus community:

As I wrap up my third week as interim president of Michigan State, I want to give you an update on our activity.

From the beginning, a primary goal has been to foster a safer campus environment based on principles of respect and accountability, while recognizing that among us are survivors of sexual abuse who have raised serious concerns about how they were treated, how our community responded, and what is being done to prevent future assaults.

Certainly, Michigan State is not alone in the national reckoning stemming from the growing awareness of relationship abuse and sexual violence. Repugnant stories in the news about how powerful men treated women, the rising societal intolerance of relationship abuse and sexual violence stemming from that greater awareness, and the social media coverage, shocking #MeToo testimonials, and even revelations involving news organizations, including ESPN, FOX, and NBC, have made it clear to all that behaviors must change. This is a long overdue national conversation, and MSU is very much part of it. We have to respond and we have to lead.

I have been meeting with many MSU community members and groups, and they have given me feedback on the weaknesses in our current approach, as well as very constructive suggestions to improve our response to someone who has been the victim of a sexual assault. We’re ready now to act on the advice we’ve been given. To assist me, I’m announcing today the formation of a new Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Expert Advisory Workgroup.

The workgroup is composed of impressively qualified leaders from throughout the MSU community, individuals with expertise in handling issues of sexual misconduct and who are committed to prompt action. They will look at the various proposals and make recommendations to me.

The workgroup will begin work in the days ahead. The pace will be brisk. To assure that all inputs are received, we have set up an interactive feature on the president’s website: president.msu.edu.

The workgroup also will continue to solicit input from campus organizations, committees, and individuals to ensure that diverse viewpoints are considered, including the voices of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. This allows community members who might not otherwise have a chance to contribute suggestions and feedback to give us their best ideas.
Special attention also is being paid to the issue of prevention. We could use everyone’s help on this. While the workgroup will be expected to consider long-term issues associated with relationship violence and sexual assault, it also will move swiftly to formulate consensus on actions that can or need to be taken now.

We made another major announcement on February 14 about a new structure for our health colleges, clinical practices, and student wellness programs. Not only do we mean to improve near-term safety, transparency, and accountability for those served by our health care educational and clinical systems, we want to become a national model of alignment for quality and efficiency of health services.

Other recent actions:

- MSU has now produced digital data equivalent to more than 80,000 pages of documentation to turn over to William Forsyth, the independent special counsel heading an investigation for the Michigan Attorney General’s Office. The equivalent of 15,000 pages has also been turned over to one of the investigating House committees in Washington, D.C.

- Demonstrating the university’s commitment to full cooperation across the campus with legal and other inquiries, I sent a message to all MSU employees setting forth clear expectations that anyone contacted by the Office of the General Counsel is expected to provide full and prompt assistance. MSU also suspended a departmental administrator over concerns associated with such compliance.

- To help us address the concerns of various federal departments and agencies of the Executive Branch and before Congress, MSU engaged former Michigan Gov. James J. Blanchard and his law firm, DLA Piper, in a one-year service agreement.

- MSU moved to revoke tenure for William Strampel, former dean of the College of Osteopathic Medicine. A request to the Office of the Provost began the process to terminate his employment as a faculty member.

- To handle a rising number of sexual assault incident reports to MSU’s Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) and ensure more timely investigations, we enlisted Kroll, Inc., a leading global provider of investigative services, to serve as an independent third party to help investigate complaints filed under MSU’s Title IX Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy. Kroll began reviewing complaints immediately.

- Working with our executive vice presidents, several positions were immediately authorized for addition to our sexual assault response resources, including a new
Sexual Assault Program staff member, two staffers for the Employee Assistance Program and several Counseling and Psychiatric Services vacancies.

- A number of administrative changes were made, including naming an interim athletic director, interim College of Osteopathic Medicine dean, new vice president and special counsel to the president, an interim vice president for legal affairs, and the engagement of former Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Young of the Dickinson Wright law firm to oversee outside legal firms assisting MSU.

- Finally, in addition to frequent meetings with administrative staff, including the provost, vice presidents, directors, and others, I’ve made it a point to begin developing relationships with students and faculty members including:
  
  o Council of Graduate Students president  
  o Associated Students of MSU president  
  o Council of Racial and Ethnic Students  
  o Council of Progressive Students  
  o African Students Leadership Association  
  o Faculty Steering Committee at Large  
  o Black Faculty, Staff, and Administrators Association  
  o Sexual Violence Advisory Committee  
  o Violence Free Communities  
  o Student athletes  
  o Athletic Council

It is my earnest hope that the steps we’re taking, and those to follow, will lay a solid foundation for a more safe and civil culture at Michigan State. Thank you for your own contributions toward this important end.

Sincerely,

John Engler  
President