April 14, 2014

To Members of the University Community,

During the past year, the University community has engaged in a series of forums and meetings to discuss plans and possible actions regarding public safety at URI. The most significant of these has been a thoughtful and serious campus-wide conversation regarding arming University police officers, stemming from recommendations following the review of the emergency response to the April 4, 2013 incident in the Chafee Social Science Center.

I thank everyone who participated in these discussions about the University's overall responsiveness and approach to emergency situations. In particular, thoughtful perspectives were shared about the need for sensitivity to issues of race and racial profiling, understanding and responsiveness to mental health concerns, and embracing nonviolent approaches to resolving conflict. These perspectives will become integral and ongoing components of our community agenda moving forward. Indeed, the vitality of our community is directly tied to both our sensitivity to such issues as well as ensuring the safety of our students, faculty, staff, and guests. The concerns, suggestions, and questions raised during this campus dialogue have been informative, enlightening, and constructive to our efforts to enhance safety and improve communications.

After considering the input we received from all members of our community, and following thorough discussions with the University's senior leadership, I have concluded it is in the best interest of the University and the safety of our community to initiate the process to arm campus police officers. This was not an easy decision but, as President, my foremost responsibility is to take all necessary steps to maximize the safety of our community. To ensure a timely and effective emergency response, University police officers must function as our first responders and therefore must be equipped to carry out this responsibility, as recommended by the State Police, the South Kingstown Police, and the R.I. Attorney General. To do anything less could put members of the URI community, including the men and women of the University's police department, at risk.

In my view, disregarding the potential for such a risk would be irresponsible. Furthermore, I am convinced that arming our police to help protect our community, and enhancing our sensitivity to issues of racial profiling, mental health, and nonviolent conflict resolution are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, we should move forward on all of these issues simultaneously. While I recognize that our community has been divided on the issue of arming, I ask that we now join together to implement this policy and other measures to promote a safe, respectful, and just environment on our campuses.
The University will continue ongoing efforts to improve the security of our campuses. Numerous measures have already been implemented. We will continue to improve the capabilities, training, and education of our police officers, and to enhance communication to promote community awareness of important resources and procedures.

The University's Department of Public Safety will develop an implementation plan to outline the policies, procedures, training, and other initiatives necessary to proceed with an effective and appropriate implementation of the arming decision. Preparation for an armed University Police Department will include:

- Intensive training on use-of-force policies and procedures; decision-making on firearm use in a variety of situations; and University Community-Based Policing;
- Substantive training and education on multicultural competency and mental health awareness;
- Additional psychological testing and background checks for eligible officers;
- Development of policies for review of all situations in which a firearm is drawn, pointed, or discharged;
- Establishment of a URI Police Policy and Procedure Oversight Committee made up of faculty, staff, students and law enforcement personnel.

The implementation plan will be made available in May for review by the campus community. It is anticipated that the implementation plan will begin in June and will be completed for the start of the spring 2015 semester. The Department of Public Safety will submit a department readiness report to me for final issuance of firearms to the department at that time.

I want to thank all members of the URI community for their time and thoughtful engagement in these discussions, and in particular, leaders of the Faculty and Student Senates, for their valuable input and support of the process. I also want to acknowledge the work of Christina Valentino, Vice President of Finance and Administration, Stephen Baker, Director of Public Safety, and the men and women of URI's Police Department who carry out their critical and challenging duties with professionalism and respect for each member of our community. Vice President Valentino and Director Baker will oversee the implementation of this plan and keenly understand the solemn responsibilities that accompany this decision.

Our foremost priority is the safety and security of every member of our community. I ask for your collective support as we work to maintain a safe environment for everyone.

Sincerely,

David M. Dooley, Ph.D.
President