

TESTIMONY OF

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

BEFORE THE

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Chairman LaValle, Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education:

Good morning. I am Jeremy Travis, President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a senior college within the City University of New York. I am joined this morning by Dr. Ellen Scrivner, Director of the John Jay Leadership Academy, an initiative of our college designed to support and promote the development of leaders in the law enforcement and criminal justice professions across the country.

This morning, I will speak briefly about the response of the John Jay College community to the recent tragic events at Virginia Tech. Dr. Scrivner and I also bring two additional perspectives to this hearing. As Chairman LaValle knows, I have served as Deputy Commissioner for Legal Matters of the New York City Police Department, and Director of the National Institute of Justice. In both positions, I worked on issues of campus and school safety, including an appointment as Chairman of the Chancellor's Advisory Panel on School Safety, appointed in 1990 by New York City Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez. Dr. Scrivner, who is a psychologist with extensive work on policing issues, served most recently as Deputy Superintendent for Administration in the Chicago Police Department, following her tenure as Deputy Director of the Community-Oriented Policing Services (or COPS) office in the Department of Justice where she directed the national training and technical assistance activities of that office. Last week, Dr. Scrivner attended a meeting in Baltimore of the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, where these law enforcement professionals were discussing the lessons from Virginia Tech for their campuses.

Like all other institutions of higher education around the country, the John Jay College community was horrified and saddened by the killings at Virginia Tech. On Tuesday morning following the shootings, I convened our executive staff to agree upon a set of responses. Our first concern was the well-being of our students and faculty. Within 24 hours of the incidents, we had mobilized our counseling staff and advised our community that anyone who was experiencing anxiety, depression, or any other emotional difficulty in the wake of the Virginia Tech incidents could seek assistance from these trained professionals. We then reviewed our emergency response protocols, and sent a message to our community reminding them that our campus has a public address system in place in all our buildings so that

emergency messages or evacuation orders could be instantly conveyed throughout the college. As this committee is well aware, one of the questions arising in Virginia Tech was the communications between administration and students on campus as those events unfolded. We wanted our students, faculty, and staff to know we could communicate instantly.

Third, we have instituted a number of steps to ensure that our emergency response plan is more than a plan that exists in a manual. Over the next few months, we will be conducting a training program for all key stakeholders on our campus in the key elements of that plan. As a result of regularly scheduled fire drills, we are confident regarding our ability to fully evacuate the buildings quickly and in an orderly fashion in case of any emergency. In addition to that we will conduct a mock disaster drill with help of local public safety agencies to ensure that we can be better prepared in case of such emergencies. We are also implementing a workplace violence strategy and the College Security Committee meets regularly to give key stakeholders an opportunity to speak to our security team about public safety concerns. Consistent with the guidance from the City University of New York, referenced in the testimony of Vice Chancellor Dobrin, we will also reach out to our local police precinct, hospital, and other community service providers to ensure that those lines of communication are open in the event of an emergency.

The fourth step we have taken has to do with prevention and threat assessment. To help address this we have created a Committee on Students in Crisis, chaired by our Vice President for Student Development, Dr. Berenecea Johnson-Eanes.

One of the important lessons from Virginia Tech is the need for coordinated approach –involving the campus, and external entities such as the police, criminal justice and mental health systems – regarding students who are posing a danger to themselves or others. A “student in crisis” can present him or herself to any number of individuals and entities within a campus setting – a faculty member, a counselor, a sports coach, fellow students, administrator or security officer. We believe that our campus should have an ongoing mechanism for sharing information about such students and, more importantly, developing coordinated responses to the behaviors and possibly mental health issues presented by those students.

Answering these questions through the well-timed and thoughtful intervention in the life of a student in crisis can make an enormous difference in that student's life, can contribute to the well-being of a college community, and can potentially save the lives of others.

We recognize that there are a host of legal and procedural issues that we will confront when we engage in information sharing about specific individuals. But, working with the University's General Counsel and others, we are committed to working those issues through so that we can take responsible actions when our students are exhibiting troublesome behavior.

I am also pleased to be joined this morning by Dr. Ellen Scrivner. Dr. Scrivner has been involved extensively at the national level in campus security initiatives, including responses to the Columbine shootings. Last week, Dr. Scrivner facilitated a meeting of the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) in Baltimore, MD. I would like to share some of the recommendations that came from that meeting:

- Safety planning must be comprehensive. Although the focus of attention is now understandably on the phenomenon of the "rampage shooter," it is very important that campus safety professionals address issues of alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, and dating violence.
- Behavioral assessment tools should be developed. Administrators, faculty, and students would benefit from guidance regarding the behaviors that are precursors to problems.
- Environmental design is important. College campuses are typically multi-building complexes, sometimes resembling small towns, which should be built and equipped with safety in mind.
- Collaborations should be robust. The relationships between security forces – campus, local, state – can be critical to the development successful response protocols. These relationships should be memorialized in Memorandum of Understanding, and tested in practice drills.

The overarching consensus coming from the Baltimore meeting was the importance of developing professional campus administrators. In some college towns, the campus police force may be as large as (or larger than) the local police. In some cases, the campus police are better trained; in other

cases, the opposite is true. Beginning at the executive level of the University Chancellor or College President, and Mayor or Town Supervisor, it is critically important that these relationships be strengthened, built on a sense of professional respect, and tested through mock exercises and frequent training programs.

I appreciate the invitation to testify before this committee this morning, and commend you for tackling this crucial issue in a timely way. My colleagues and I at John Jay College of Criminal Justice are eager to work with this committee as you pursue the important agenda of improving the security of New York State's colleges and universities.