December 2, 2015

TO: June Pierce Youatt, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs; William Beekman, Vice President and Secretary of the Board of Trustees; Deb Bittner, President, Clerical Technical Union of Michigan State University; Captain Doug Monette, Michigan State University Police Department

FROM: Full Council of the Council of Graduate Students

SUBJECT: Regarding the operations of the Department of Police and Public Safety Oversight Committee

Dear Provost Youatt and Board of Trustees,

The Full Council of the Council of Graduate Students would like to bring some concerns with regards to the operations (or lack thereof) of the Department of Police and Public Safety Oversight Committee to your attention.

A representative of the Council of Graduate Students has typically held a seat on that committee and this year, a concern raised has been that the committee has not met to conduct business at all since the start of this academic year and further that the committee has not been convened to carry out its responsibilities since 2013. According to the current Public Safety (DPPS) Oversight Committee Policy, the purpose of this committee is to “receive and address grievances by persons against the Police Officers or the Police Department and may make recommendations to the Police Chief that disciplinary measures be taken by the Department against any Police Officer who is found responsible for misconduct in office”; Further, in the same document, it is stated that the committee is charged with “review(ing) the investigation of complaints received to ensure that responsible procedures have been followed and actions are taken in a timely manner, when warranted”.

Upon enquiry by both our representative to the committee as well as executive board members, it was suggested that the committee meets as needed and that no such need has emerged to necessitate the convening of this committee. However, we have been made aware of the existence of a number of complaints which have been filed by students which have not been brought to the attention of the committee members and thus have not been reviewed by the DPPS oversight committee. Given the statistics of concerns and complaints raised with Police interactions with civilians and students, we thought it surprising that in 3 years, no concerns meriting review by an oversight committee have emerged.

The complaint procedures outlined in the above mentioned document state that only complaints deemed credible in nature by the Chairperson of the committee shall be forwarded for review to the committee members. That the determination of credibility of a case is determined by only one individual is concerning, as this defeats the purpose of a committee process. Further, failing to thoroughly vet all complaints would constitute a failure to carry out the responsibilities of the committee outlined in its’ own policy. Further, the civilian oversight boards, such as the DPPS Oversight Committee, are mandated by state law (Public Safety Officers Act 120 of 1990 Sect. 1.3) and specifically charged with “receive(ing) and address(ing) grievances by persons against the public safety officers or the public safety department of the institution.” We, the graduate students of Michigan State University (MSU), therefore ask that the committee be required to meet at least once a month to review activities and civilian interactions with the department in the
preceding months and that documents pertaining to all grievances received by the Chair
of the oversight committee, irrespective of their perceived legitimacy by the Chair, be
forwarded to all Committee members for review and that the legitimacy of grievances be
determined collectively by the committee. We also ask that all documentation pertaining
to grievances filed against Police Officers or the MSU police and Public Safety
Department, including informal complaints, made in written or verbal form, be
forwarded to the chair of the committee and subsequently to all Committee members for
review in a timely manner.

Further, because there are currently no guidelines in place that describe what types of
grievances are forwarded to the chair of the oversight committee or what constitutes a
legitimate complaint or a complaint meriting review by the oversight committee, it is
unclear how these decisions are being made and by whom. We, Spartans in the graduate
community ask that the DPPS oversight committee, in consultation with the general
counsel’s office and MSUPD, develop guidelines for the determination of legitimacy of
complaints against the DPPS or any officer associated with the department, and that the
committee, in conjunction with the MSU DPPS and any other relevant university units
develop and disseminate a policy on how complaints made against the DPPS will be
handled.

To our Police Department and Officers, we thank you for your service and for the
opportunity to contribute to the betterment of our community.

Go Green!
The Council of Graduate Students (COGS) is the constitutionally authorized government representing all graduate and professional students at Michigan State University. COGS actively promotes the improvement of both the individual and collective graduate experience by working with university administrators on a multitude of graduate student issues that range from degree requirements to housing to health care.