

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 24-59

BOARD DATE: June 3, 2024

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the April 30, 2024 recommendation of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees recommending Dr. Donna Hodge as President of Fitchburg State University. Such appointment is effective on or before July 1, 2024, is subject to the successful and satisfactory completion of a State Police background check, and is subject to and in accordance with the attached Terms and Conditions of Appointment.

VOTED: Motion adopted by the BHE on 6/3/2024.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Sections 9(q) and 21

Contact: Constantia T. Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel

Background

The Board of Higher Education (BHE) is a coordinating board, with some governing authority, over the public higher education system. Among the BHE's governing functions are its statutory responsibilities to approve the appointment and removal of, and set the compensation for, the president of each state university and community college within the public higher education system. M.G.L. c. 15A, §§ 9(q) and 21.

In furtherance of these legislative requirements, and consistent with the BHE's responsibility to establish overall goals in order to achieve a well-coordinated, quality system of public higher education in the Commonwealth, to establish coordination between and among institutions, and to resolve conflicts of policies or operations, the BHE issued guidelines and procedures for the search, selection, appointment and removal of the chief executive officers at state universities and community colleges. M.G.L. c. 15A, §§ 9(c) and (u). [BHE Presidential Search, Selection, Appointment and Removal Guidelines \(2013\)](#). The BHE Presidential Guidelines establish minimum procedural expectations for Board of Trustees conducting presidential searches, delegate to the Commissioner the authority to act on behalf of the BHE as specified therein, and include several touchpoints between local Board of Trustee Chairs and the Commissioner to ensure that the Presidential search process is being conducted consistent with the BHE and the Commissioner's expectations.

The Fitchburg State University (FSU) Board of Trustees initiated the search process for the next President of FSU in October 2023, and conducted the search with the assistance of search consultants at WittKiefer. As required under state law and the BHE's implementing guidelines, the Commissioner appointed a voting member to the search committee, Associate Commissioner Mario Delci, who participated in the development of the position profile, the selection and interviews of semi-finalist candidates, and the search committee decisions to recommend final candidates for public interviews. (The Fitchburg State University Presidential Position Profile may be accessed through the following link: [presidential prospectus 2023_24 FINAL.pdf \(fitchburgstate.edu\)](#))

The search committee selected four finalists for advancement and consideration. One candidate subsequently withdrew after securing an appointment at another institution, and the following final three candidates participated in FSU Board of Trustee interviews and virtual campus visits during the weeks April 11th, 17th and 23rd:

- Dr. Karim Ismaili
- Dr. Mark Overmyer-Velázquez
- Dr. Donna Souder Hodge

During that time, the BHE was extended an opportunity to interview all candidates, as provided by the BHE Presidential Guidelines. The Commissioner and the Secretary of Education engaged in this procedural touchpoint on behalf of the BHE and interviewed all three candidates on behalf of the BHE; consistent with our current practice these interviews were recorded.

On April 30, 2024 the FSU Board of Trustees voted to recommend Dr. Donna Souder Hodge to the BHE for approval and appointment, subject to and in accordance with the attached Terms of Appointment. M.G.L. c. 15A, § 21.

The Commissioner has received and reviewed the FSU Board of Trustee's recommendation, along with all supporting materials, and has determined that the submittal is complete and the search was conducted in alignment with the BHE Presidential Guidelines. Accordingly, the Commissioner is forwarding the recommendation to the BHE for consideration and formal action.

Attachments to BHE 24-59:

02a_Dr. Donna Souder Hodge Presidential Search Cover Letter

02b_Dr. Donna Souder Hodge Resume (CV)

02c_Fitchburg State University Presidential Search Summary

02d_Fitchburg State University Board Chair Letter to Commissioner Ortega

02e_Terms of Appointment Letter_Donna Souder Hodge