

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 21-47

BOARD DATE: May 18, 2021

WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the April 28, 2021 recommendation of the Westfield State University Board of Trustees recommending Dr. Linda Thompson as President of Westfield State University. Such appointment is effective on or about July 1, 2021, 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 of Appointment.

VOTED: Motion adopted by BHE 5/18/2021.

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

Contact: Constantia T. Papanikolaou, General 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 Westfield State University (WSU) Board of Trustees initiated the search process for the President of WSU in the summer of 2020, and conducted the search with the assistance of search consultants at WittKieffer. As required under state law and the BHE's implementing guidelines, the Commissioner appointed a voting member to the search committee, Deputy Commissioner Thomas Simard, 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 WSU Presidential Position Profile may be accessed through the following link <https://www.westfield.ma.edu/images/uploads/president/search/PresidentSearch-web.pdf>).

The following four finalists were selected for and participated in WSU Board of Trustee interviews and virtual campus visits during the weeks April 5th and 12th: Dione Somerville, Ed.D.; Kristin Esterberg, Ph.D.; Darrell Kruger, Ph.D.; and Linda Thompson, DrPH. During that time, the BHE was extended an opportunity to interview all candidates, as required by the BHE Presidential Guidelines. The Commissioner, the

Secretary of Education, and Board Member Patty Eppinger engaged in this procedural touchpoint and interviewed all candidates on behalf of the BHE. During the course the campus visits and stakeholder interviews, two candidates (Drs. Somerville and Esterberg) withdrew their candidacies.

On April 28, 2021 the WSU Board of Trustees voted to recommend Dr. Linda Thompson 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 WSU 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 21-47:

04a_Linda Thompson Cover Letter

04b_Linda Thompson Resume (CV)

04c_Letter from Westfield State Chair Queenin to Commissioner Santiago

04d_Westfield Search Process Summary

04e_Terms of Appointment_L. Thompson (forthcoming)