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TO: University of Vermont Graduate Students

FROM: The Graduate Student Senate

DATE: March X, 2022

SUBJECT: X

At the University of Vermont, there have been recent discussions about moving the University forward while promoting a campus climate that is safe and healthy for all students, staff, and faculty. The Graduate Student Senate (GSS) strives to be a part of building this better future.

Some survivors of sexual violence have come forward with their stories on social media, in newspapers, and in other major outlets. GSS appreciates and respects that survivors make the best choices that they can make given their trauma and their needs on their individual healing journeys. GSS respects the humanity of survivors and does not critique their choices as they deal with their trauma. For this reason, GSS stands with survivors and their freedom of expression in any forum.

As the University of Vermont enhances its programming to support survivors on their healing journeys while promoting cultural transformation, we are now discussing the creation of survivor spaces, which can be both safe spaces and courageous spaces, to enable survivors to share their stories.

Previously, survivors who chose to come forward through mass communications outlets did not have the option to share their stories in these survivor spaces. As quality survivor space programming is established, it is entirely feasible that many survivors will choose survivor spaces to share their stories and seek the help and support that they may desire on their healing journeys. This will likely result in a voluntary migration away from mass communications outlets.

GSS recommends that any University communications about these survivor spaces focus entirely on the positive virtues of these survivor spaces and avoid any mention of social media or mass communications outlets. Given the history of criticism of students coming forward on social media and the consistent backlash to that criticism, GSS recommends that the promotion of survivor spaces, which create an excellent step forward, not be confused or mixed with any mention of those other outlets.

Focusing entirely on the positive benefits of the survivor spaces will help unite the UVM community, support the healing journeys of survivors, and bring UVM Forward.