From: Tom Sullivan, President
To: UVM Community
Re: Andrew Harris Recognition

As you know, on April 4, 2014, I charged a Committee with the task of determining how our University would recognize and celebrate Andrew Harris. To our present knowledge, he is the University of Vermont’s first African American graduate. I am writing to provide an update on the status of the Committee’s work and recommendations.

George Washington Henderson, who graduated in 1877, was thought to be the University’s first African American graduate. He was the first African American elected to the University of Vermont’s Phi Beta Kappa chapter in 1877. Andrew Harris, who graduated in 1838, was not identified as the first African American graduate for more than 160 years. This rediscovery has given the University an opportunity to properly recognize and pay tribute to him and to affirm our commitment to the values outlined in Our Common Ground Statement.

I want to convey my appreciation and thanks to Jeffrey Marshall, Special Collections director in 1998 at UVM Libraries, Bob Buckeye, archivist at Middlebury College in 1998, Tom Weaver, editor of Vermont Quarterly magazine in 2004 and Kevin Thornton, Senior Lecturer, for their research and scholarship that has educated us regarding Andrew Harris’ legacy and contributions to democracy and equality in society. Their efforts, in substantial ways, have lead us, at UVM, to recognize belatedly one of its own.

I appreciate and value the thoughtful approach by the Committee. Please help me thank the Andrew Harris Committee members: Aya Al-Namee, Mache Chase, Jesse Cormier, Beverly Colston, Clarence Davis, Wanda Heading-Grant, Leon Heyward, and Harvey Amani Whitfield for their work, collaboration, and recommendations as those with whom they consulted. I am grateful to them for giving their time to this important institutional matter. I support and approve the following recommendations:

1. A plaque designed and dedicated to Andrew Harris to be displayed in the Waterman Building at a dedication ceremony and celebration;
2. A student academic scholarship created in Andrew Harris’ name;
3. An Address that highlights Andrew Harris’ legacy and importance to UVM in my 2014 Commencement Speech;
4. The creation of an Andrew Harris Award to be presented at the annual UVM ALANA Student Award’s Banquet to a student who exemplifies and embodies the values and principals of Andrew Harris; and
5. The placement of an academic chair with the UVM seal and special placard in the Waterman Memorial Lounge to honor Andrew Harris.

With appreciation to our UVM community for the many thoughtful comments and recommendations on the important issue of appropriately honoring Andrew Harris, a member of the Class of 1838.

Thank you.