



Preventing Sexual Harassment and Assault on Campuses

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SUMMARY: The purpose of this memorandum is to recommend that Congressman Joaquin Castro **support programs, legislation and funding that keep all college students safe from sexual violence.** The topic of sexual assault and harassment has gained momentum with the #MeToo movement, yet incidents of sexual violence continue to occur on a regular basis in our communities.

Data gathered by The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey revealed approximately 26.9% of Hispanic women experience contact sexual violence*. In the state of Texas alone 18,750 victims of sexual assault were reported in 2017. Equally alarming is that 20%- 25% of college women and 15% of college men are victims of forced sex during their time in college†. As a Hispanic woman attending college in San Antonio, Texas, I am concerned for the safety of myself and the members of my community.

BACKGROUND: According to data collected by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old. In college, nearly two-thirds of students experience sexual harassment‡. Furthermore, female and male undergraduate students experienced rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation at a rate of 23.1% and 5.4% respectively§. The age group with highest sexual assault victims in Texas is 15 to 19 years old with over 4,000 victims¶. In the U.S., the average estimates of Hispanic women who will experience contact sexual violence are 4,296,000, rape (completed or attempted) is 2,401,000, and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences is 4,190,000**.

Sexual violence can be confronted through prevention programs. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) establishes funding for the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) that administers grants to local, state and tribal governments, courts,

* Smith, S. G., Chen, J., Basile, K. C., Gilbert, L. K., Merrick, M. T., Patel, N., ... Jain, A. (2017). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010-2012 state report. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: (Table 3.11 - Page 40) <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

† Cullen, F., Fisher, B., & Turner, M., The sexual victimization of college women (NCJ 182369). (2000). Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>

‡ National Sexual Violence Resource Center - Get Statistics <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>

§ David Cantor, Bonnie Fisher, Susan Chibnall, Reanna Townsend, et. al. Association of American Universities (AAU), Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (September 21, 2015).

¶ Crime in Texas Report - <http://www.dps.texas.gov/crimereports/17/citCh7.pdf>

** Smith, S. G., Chen, J., Basile, K. C., Gilbert, L. K., Merrick, M. T., Patel, N., ... Jain, A. (2017). (Table 3.2 - Page 21)

non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, secondary schools, institutions of higher education, and state and tribal coalitions. This funding supports prevention programs such as Bystander Intervention programs. Bystander Intervention is a training session where individuals are taught how to identify and safely intervene when witnessing gender-violence such as sexual assault and harassment. My university is a recipient of one of these grants and is establishing a bystander intervention program for the campus community.

Title IX protects students from discrimination based on sex, including sexual harassment*, rape and sexual assault, in education programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. The Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that universities are following these rights and protecting all students from sexual violence. However, there has been recent attempts to amend the rules of Title IX, making it harder for students to report, and in some cases, forcing universities to uphold ignore reports of sexual assault or harassment†.

KEY OUTCOMES: If Congressman Joaquin Castro adopt the recommendations of this memorandum, then:

- **Students who receive prevention training from programs authorized by VAWA will be able to identify and safely handle situations of sexual misconduct.** Due to distorted views of what is consent, individuals can find it difficult to know when certain behaviors are either appropriate/wanted or if they are not. Also, because of the variety of situations, individuals are hesitant to intervene because they do not know how to help.
- **A further commitment to having safe communities.** Prevention trainings will help individuals be prepared and confident to intervene and enforcement of Title IX rights will keep students around the country safe.

APPROACH:

1. **Support H.R. 1585, The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2019**
By supporting the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), more students will be able to access programs and services for victims of sexual violence.
2. **Advocate for additional funding for the OVW.** The OVW offers grants to organizations to provide programs such as Bystander Intervention.
3. **Provide oversight of the Department of Justice and the Department of Education** It is imperative that Congress oversees the Department of Education

* <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/title-ix-and-sexual-assault>

† <https://civilrights.org/resource/civil-and-human-rights-community-joint-comment-on-title-ix-nprm/>

(ED) in their enforcement of Title IX rights which acknowledge the complexity and gravity of sexual violence. Title IX provides protection for students who fall in the most at-risk age demographic. With recent attempts by the Department of Education to dismantle these rights, Congress must ensure that the Department of Education is doing its job in protecting all students from sexual violence.

CONCLUSION: I urge for the support of reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act. Many individuals, including Texas residents, depend on the services brought forth through this legislation act. Proactive and safe communities are emerging across the nation as a result of programs from the OVW.