

Committee on House Administration
Hearing “Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Congressional Workplace”
November 14, 2017
1310 Longworth House Office Building

Chairman Harper, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee on House Administration, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

Since I started #MeTooCongress by sharing my own story, my office has been inundated with calls from current and former Hill staffers subjected to inexcusable behavior and sexual assault. From comments like “Are you going to be a good girl?,” to harassers exposing their genitals, to victims having their private parts grabbed on the House floor, women and men have trusted me with their stories. All they asked in return was that we fix our abusive system and hold the perpetrators accountable.

I’ve been working on this issue since 2014 and believe there are three steps Congress can take to fix this inexcusable problem. The first step is to require sexual harassment prevention and response training every year for both Members and staff, just like ethics and cybersecurity training. This is a simple change of the House Rules, and there is already committee and bipartisan support for my bill, H.Res. 604, that would do this. A special thanks to Ranking Member Brady and to Congressmen Costello and Poliquin for their leadership on this legislation.

Second, we can’t fix what we don’t know about. In my experience working on sexual harassment and sexual violence on college campuses, in academia, and in the U.S. military, climate surveys are key to recognizing the scope of the problem and to evaluating the effectiveness of reforms. That’s why Congress should institute a Congressional climate survey every two years.

Third, we must reform the broken dispute resolution process. Under the current process, congressional employees are, at best, unaware or confused and at worst are utterly betrayed. This flow chart shows the current process:

**[POINT TO FLOW CHART
ON SCREEN]**

When an employee goes to the Office of Compliance to make a complaint, they are first subject to 30 days of confidential counseling with an OOC legal counselor. This time period may be shortened, if the employee agrees to go straight to mediation.

But before beginning mediation, the employee must agree to a nondisclosure agreement – not just regarding the topics discussed in mediation, which is common practice, but one that forbids them from mentioning anything at all to anyone. Employees are entirely alone for at least another 30 days, with no support from their families or religious leaders.

Additionally, the harasser and the Member’s office are represented for free by House of Representatives counsel, but the employee must pay for his or her own legal representation.

I have also heard from mediators who say the Congressional process is atypical in that the survivors don’t have the option to be in separate rooms as the defendant’s counsel and that survivors are often addressed in an aggressive manner.

If the employee makes it this far, they endure an additional 30 day cooling off period before they are finally allowed to file a formal complaint, either with the OOC or Federal District Court.

Throughout this agonizing time, the employee must continue to work in his or her office alongside the harasser, without saying a word to friends or family, and while their employer knows that they are engaged in mediation or pursuing a complaint.

For the few survivors who secure a settlement, there is no disclosure of the office involved or the amount of funds paid. Taxpayers foot the bill and the harasser goes on with his or her life.

Meanwhile, the survivor is faced with personal, professional, and financial catastrophe. Is it any wonder that many staffers never file formal complaints? There is zero accountability and transparency.

In closing, I want to reiterate that I am heartened by the outpouring of support from my colleagues on both sides of the aisle about the need for legislation to address these issues.

Additionally, I was delighted to see that last Thursday a bipartisan group of Senators, led by Senators Grassley, Feinstein, Klobuchar, Gillibrand, and Ernst, passed a companion to our anti-harassment mandatory training resolution in their Chamber.

In the House, I have put forward two proposals, and I look forward to working with the Committee to make sure that we protect the vulnerable, provide accountability to our

constituents and our taxpayers, and meet the highest standards of how to prevent and respond to sexual harassment.

Thank you.