



July 16, 2018

Via electronic mail to michele.lisio@mahouse.gov, alicia.delvento@mahouse.gov, and lauren.matteodo@mahouse.gov.

Speaker Robert DeLeo	Chair Jeffrey Sánchez	Vice-Chair Stephen Kulik
House of Representatives	House Ways and Means	House Ways and Means
24 Beacon Street	24 Beacon Street	24 Beacon Street
Room 356	Room 243	Room 238
Boston, MA, 02133	Boston, MA, 02133	Boston, MA, 02133

Speaker DeLeo, Chair Sánchez and Vice-Chair Kulik:

On behalf of student survivors of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and dating violence, we write to **urge you to amend Resolution H.4159, the “Every Voice” Climate Survey Bill**, to ensure this important legislation matches best practices and achieves its goal of protecting Massachusetts students from gender-based violence, **and to report the amended Climate Survey bill out favorably as soon as possible** so that it can receive a vote on the House floor.

In recent years, student survivors across the nation have come forward to expose widespread sexual harassment and violence on campus. National surveys show that more than one in five undergraduate women experience sexual violence during their time in college.¹ In the wake of the #MeToo movement, thousands of graduate students have also come forward to report experiences of sexual harassment in academia.² H.4159 seeks to address this crisis by creating a state task force to develop a model sexual misconduct climate survey measuring sexual harassment and assault in Massachusetts schools, students access to support services, perceptions of campus safety, and other information. The bill further requires all colleges and universities in the commonwealth to issue either the model survey (or another appropriate instrument approved by the commissioner of higher education) and to release the results publicly within 120 days. This information is critical for students, survivors, and families who deserve to know which schools are effectively fighting campus sexual assault. **The Climate Survey bill will also provide valuable information on where, when, and how often sexual assault occurs on our college campuses, which will enable policymakers and school administrators to design more effective prevention programs. For these reasons, we urge you to report H.4159 out favorably.**

¹ See David Cantor, et al., Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct Westat 13-14 (2015), <http://ow.ly/XOL15>; see generally B.S. Fisher, L.E. Daigle, & F.T. Cullen, *Unsafe in the Ivory Tower: The Sexual Victimization of College Women* (2010); Christopher P. Krebs et al., *The Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study*, NAT'L INST. JUST. 5- 3 (2007), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/W6MP-X7VE>].

² See Colleen Flaherty, 'Holding Space' for Victims of Harassment, INSIDE HIGHER ED, (December 8, 2017), <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/12/08/what-can-crowdsourced-survey-sexual-harassment-academia-tell-us-about-problem>

Students, parents, and alumni deserve comprehensive data on how their schools respond to sexual violence and harassment, especially as families decide what schools their children will attend each fall. H.1459 would provide this vital information to the Class of 2018 — but it should protect the young people who follow them, too. An earlier version of this bill, H.2988, required campus climate surveys to be issued on a recurring basis (annually), consistent with the widely-recognized best practice that surveys should be re-issued over time. **We urge you to amend the H.4159 to require that appropriate campus climate surveys be conducted every two years, consistent with national best practices. Rather than providing a one-time snapshot of sexual assault on campus, climate surveys can measure schools' progress in creating an equitable, safe educational environment.**

The American Association of Universities' Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, the most comprehensive national survey of its kind to date, covering twenty-seven participating institutions, found that victimization rates vary widely among institutions. For example, the 2015 survey found that fifteen percent of undergraduate women at Texas A&M University experience sexual violence on campus — whereas a stunning thirty percent of undergraduate women at the University of Michigan do.³ Fifteen percent of undergraduate women — or any women at all — experiencing sexual violence is unacceptable. But students deserve to know whether a school they're planning to attend is making progress towards ending sexual assault.

Campus climate surveys provide invaluable information to students and their families, they also provide valuable information to institutes of higher education. By re-issuing climate surveys over time, schools can measure the effectiveness of prevention programs and other interventions, identify areas of campus life that have disproportionate rates of sexual assault, and determine whether students are aware of campus resources, policies, and procedures — thus making it easier for each school, and the broader community, to identify the prevention and intervention strategies that most effectively fight sexual violence.

As a result, bi-annual campus climate surveys (rather than a single-shot survey) are a nationally recognized best practice. Recurring campus climate surveys have been recommended and adopted by:

The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault

In January 2017, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault issued a report identifying “regularly” conducted campus climate surveys as a best practice and strongly recommending schools **“repeat” the survey process “on a regular basis.”**⁴ The Task Force report also emphasized that information gathered from the climate surveys should be disseminated to the university community regularly. A 2014 report prepared for the Task Force by the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women also stresses the importance of **“regularly administering surveys” to “track**

³ Nick Anderson and Susan Svluca, *What a Massive Sexual Assault Survey Found at 27 Top U.S. Universities*, WASH. POST, Sept. 21, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/09/21/what-a-massive-sexual-assault-survey-showed-about-27-top-u-s-universities/?utm_term=.fafdf9cd85ca

⁴ White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, *Preventing and Addressing Campus Sexual Misconduct: A Guide for University and College Presidents, Chancellors, and Senior Administrators*, Jan. 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Documents/1.4.17.VAW%20Event.Guide%20for%20College%20Presidents.PDF>

changes over time,” such as decreases in sexual assaults and increases in awareness or reporting.⁵

Leading Anti-Sexual Assault Advocates

Anti-sexual assault advocates and victims’ rights organizations have **uniformly recommended regularly administered, repeating campus climate surveys as a best practice**. Know Your IX, a national survivor-led campaign to end sexual violence in schools, calls for states to require schools administer a comprehensive **climate survey every two years**.⁶ The National Women’s Law Center supports legislation to requiring schools to “conduct biennial campus climate surveys,”⁷ as do the American Association of University Women, the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, End Rape on Campus, and SurvJustice.⁸

State Legislation Fighting Gender-Based Violence

H. 4159’s one-time campus climate survey would provide significantly less transparency than similar legislation passed by states across the country over the last five years. For example, Maryland requires all institutions of higher education administer a sexual misconduct campus climate survey “at least every 2 years.”⁹ New York requires every institution to conduct campus climate surveys “no less than every other year.”¹⁰ The New Jersey Task Force on Campus Sexual Assault, which recently issued a report detailing recommendations for the state legislature to fight campus sexual assault, calls for “regularly conduct” campus climate surveys.¹¹

Students attending or considering schools in the commonwealth deserve just as much transparency as students elsewhere. The legislature should ensure they are guaranteed regularly administered, biannual campus climate surveys addressing sexual assault on campus.

Time’s up for schools that want to sweep campus sexual assault under the rug. Massachusetts students, families, and community members deserve to know public safety information about their campuses. Moreover, the Every Voice Climate Survey Bill will provide administrators, policymakers, and advocates with vital information that will enable them to come together and improve campus safety for all students. More than 20 years after the American Medical Association declared sexual assault a national “silent violent epidemic,” it is time for Massachusetts to step up and set a model for the rest of the country on sexual assault prevention.

⁵ White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, *Climate Surveys: Useful Tools to Help Colleges and Universities in Their Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Sexual Assault*, April 2014, <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/page/file/910426/download>

⁶ See, e.g., Alyssa Peterson and Sejal Singh, *State Policy Playbook for Ending Campus Sexual Assault*, KNOW YOUR IX, <https://www.knowyourix.org/statepolicy-playbook/>

⁷ Lara S. Kaufmann, *HALT Campus Sexual Violence Act Introduced This Morning*, NAT’L WOMEN’S L. CTR. (June 4, 2015), <https://nwlc.org/blog/halt-campus-sexual-violence-act-introduced-morning/>

⁸ Press Release, Rep. Patrick Meehan, Meehan, Speier Introduce Bill Combatting Sexual Assault on Campus (June 5, 2015), <https://meehan.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meehan-speier-introduce-bill-combating-sexual-assault-on-campus>

⁹ *Institutions of Higher Education Sexual Assault Policy and Survey Act*, Code of Md., §11–601 (2015), http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2018RS/Statute_Web/ged/11-601.pdf

¹⁰ 7 NY Stat. Law §6445 (2015), <http://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2015/S5965>

¹¹ Alyana Alfaro, *Task Force Addressing NJ Campus Sexual Assault Releases Report*, N.Y. OBSERVER, June 21, 2017, <http://observer.com/2017/06/task-force-addressing-nj-campus-sexual-assault-releases-report/>

which schools are creating a safe environment for all students — and which schools refuse to hold perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault accountable. We therefore urge you to amend H.1459 to require biannual campus climate surveys, and to report the bill out of committee favorably, so that it can accomplish this worthy goal.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us at info@KnowYourIX.org.

Sincerely,

Know Your IX, a Project of Advocates for Youth

American Association of University Women (national)
American Association of University Women of Massachusetts
End Rape on Campus
Girls Inc. (national)
Girls Inc. of Holyoke
Girls Inc. of Worcester
National Alliance To End Sexual Violence (NAESV)
National Women's Law Center
SurvJustice