

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable John B. King, Jr.
Secretary
U. S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

September 16, 2016

Dear Secretary King:

As you are aware, in 2014, I conducted a survey of over 400 colleges and universities on sexual assault on college campuses.¹ While conducting the survey and hosting a series of roundtables on sexual assault, it became clear that federal data on sexual violence is fragmented and not easily comparable. That is why in September 2014 I requested a report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on sexual violence data collection efforts across the federal government. On August 18, 2016, GAO publicly released this report entitled, *Sexual Violence Data: Actions Needed to Improve Clarity and Address Differences Across Federal Data Collection Efforts*.²

In conducting its report, GAO examined 10 different data collection efforts across four federal agencies, including the Department of Education. The report found that the agencies used 23 different terms for sexual violence and that the different efforts used varying time frames, units of measurement, sources, and contexts. In short, GAO found the data collection efforts to be fragmented and that this fragmentation may make it more difficult for the public, policymakers, advocacy groups and others to understand the extent of sexual violence.³

GAO recommended in its report that federal agencies make public the information and factors that they use to measure sexual violence. GAO also recommended that the Office of Management and Budget “establish a federal interagency forum on sexual violence statistics.”⁴

The Department of Education agreed with the recommendation to make its measurement information publicly available, however, the Department did not fully support an interagency forum and stated that “the focus should be on the needs of each individual program.”⁵ While the needs of different agencies may differ, an interagency forum on sexual violence data collection will offer federal agencies an opportunity to discuss their data collection needs, learn from one

¹ Senator Claire McCaskill, *Sexual Violence on Campus: How too many institutions of higher education are failing to protect students* (July 9, 2014) available at <https://www.mccaskill.senate.gov/SurveyReportwithAppendix.pdf>

² Government Accountability Office, *Sexual Violence Data: Actions Needed to Improve Clarity and Address Differences Across Federal Data Collection Efforts* (July 19, 2016) (GAO-16-546) available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/678511.pdf>.

³ GAO-16-546 at 25-26.

⁴ GAO-16-546 at 33.

⁵ GAO-16-546 at 61.

another, identify areas where the agencies' data collection needs diverge, as well as areas where collaboration will produce higher quality data.

I urge you to reconsider the Department's position on an interagency forum on sexual violence data collection. I also request that the Department schedule a briefing with my staff in the next month to provide the rationale behind the Department's lack of full support for such a forum and to discuss the steps that the Department can take to reduce fragmentation in this vital data collection effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" being particularly prominent.

Claire McCaskill
U.S. Senator