

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Shaun L. Donovan  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
301 G Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20024

September 16, 2016

Dear Director Donovan:

Federal data collection on sexual violence is complicated, confusing, and fragmented. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently recommended that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) convene the agencies responsible for data collection on sexual violence. Disappointingly, OMB rejected GAO's recommendation. Because an interagency forum on sexual violence statistics will likely lead to less fragmented data collection, as well as improved government efficiency, I write to ask OMB to convene an interagency forum or working group on sexual violence data collection.

As a prosecutor and as a U.S. Senator, I have fought to combat sexual violence - to hold perpetrators fully accountable and provide support to survivors. In 2014, I held a series of roundtable discussions on sexual violence on college campuses and surveyed over 400 colleges and universities, which lead to a report on how colleges report, investigate and adjudicate sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> Through this work it has become increasingly clear that federal data on sexual violence is disjointed and not easily comparable. That is why in September 2014 I requested a report from 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*.<sup>2</sup>

The GAO report found federal sexual violence data collection to be fragmented and found that this fragmentation may make it more difficult for the public, policymakers, advocacy groups and others to understand the extent of sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> Without good data it is impossible to tell if we are making much needed improvements in preventing and responding to incidents of sexual violence. In the report GAO recommended that OMB use its authority to "establish a federal interagency forum on sexual violence statistics."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> 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>.

<sup>3</sup> GAO-16-546 at 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> GAO-16-546 at 33.

The Director of OMB has statutory authority to coordinate Federal statistics to ensure “the efficiency and effectiveness of the Federal statistical system.”<sup>5</sup> Interagency statistical forums present an opportunity for OMB to promote efficiency across the federal government. Historically, OMB has convened interagency statistical forums on race and ethnicity, household relationships, and child and family statistics. In fact, just last year OMB issued a memorandum encouraging federal agencies to “build interagency collaboration” and provided examples of how “interagency collaboration has improved the quality of Federal statistics while reducing inefficiencies.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet despite this strong history of support for interagency forums, OMB stated that it did not believe such a forum was the best use of resources in response to GAO’s recommendation. OMB argued that the agencies collecting sexual violence data were not “far enough along in its research for OMB to develop guidance or identify best practices.” However, as GAO mentioned, the majority of sexual violence data collection efforts are more than a decade old. It makes sense for OMB to take action now, rather than waste more government resources on inefficient data collection efforts that yield fragmented and confusing statistics. For these reasons, I urge OMB to follow GAO’s recommendation and convene an interagency forum on sexual violence statistics. I request that you brief my staff within the next month regarding the steps OMB will take to reduce fragmentation in this vital data collection effort.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>5</sup> 44 U.S.C. 3504(e).

<sup>6</sup> Office of Management and Budget, *Memorandum for the Heads of Selected Executive Departments and Agencies* (July 8, 2015) available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2015/m-15-15.pdf>.