United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to express our strong support for funding in the upcoming appropriations legislation that would help deter sexual assault on college and university campuses across the country. We appreciate your many efforts on this subject in the past.

Campus sexual assault is a troubling and pervasive problem on our college campuses. Every year, tens of thousands of women and men who attend college in the U.S. become victims of sexual assault. Campus sexual violence is a crime that threatens students' physical and emotional health and undermines students' right to a safe educational environment. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) requires schools to take steps to eliminate sexual harassment, including sexual assault, prevent its recurrence and address its effects. The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (the Clery Act) requires colleges and universities to disclose information about crime on and around their campuses, including sexual offenses, and establish and disseminate campus safety and security policies.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education handles the investigation and enforcement of violations of Title IX. OCR received 165 Title IX complaints regarding campus sexual violence in Fiscal Year 2015, up from 106 the previous fiscal year and just nine complaints in 2009. Due to budget constraints, OCR is currently operating with less than half the staff the office had in 1980, when OCR received roughly a third as many complaints regarding the broad range of Federal civil rights laws that OCR enforces. As of March 2, 2016, there were 210 cases under investigation by OCR at 169 postsecondary institutions for alleged violations of Title IX related to sexual violence, which is more than a three-fold increase in cases since May 2014.

Alleged violations under the Clery Act are investigated by the Clery Act Compliance Team (CACT) within Federal Student Aid's Office of Program Compliance. The CACT received 87 complaints in Fiscal Year 2015, up from 16 complaints in Fiscal Year 2012, the year that the specialized group was created. The CACT currently has 19 staff members, who are responsible for enforcement of the campus safety and crime prevention provisions of the Clery Act at over 6,000 colleges and universities across the United States.

Given the extent of the problem of sexual assault on college campuses, as well as the growing number of universities and colleges under investigation by the Department of Education for violations of Title IX related to campus sexual violence, there is a clear need for additional trained staff to enforce the laws currently on the books. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education recently began enforcement of new regulations regarding the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 amendments to the Clery Act. These regulations expanded the scope of requirements under the Clery Act for universities and colleges to more effectively address and reduce campus sexual violence. Proper enforcement of these new regulations and the existing provisions of the Clery Act and Title IX requires adequate funding.

Therefore, **we respectfully request that you provide at least $137.7 million in Fiscal Year 2017 for the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education**, the amount requested by the President, to be used in part for the investigation and enforcement of Title IX related to sexual violence. In addition, **we request sufficient funding to employ an additional eleven full-time equivalent personnel** for the investigation and enforcement of the Clery Act, as requested by the President.

It is essential that the U.S. Department of Education has the resources needed to ensure compliance with the federal laws that help protect our students from sexual violence. We ask that the Senate Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies provide adequate funding to the Office for Civil Rights and the Clery Act Compliance Team at the U.S. Department of Education to continue their vital work addressing sexual assault on college campuses. We respectfully request increased funding in order for the Department of Education to hire and train additional staff to conduct compliance reviews and investigate alleged violations of Title IX and the Clery Act. With research indicating that tens of thousands of our college students are sexually assaulted each year, it is clear that sufficient funding for the Office for Civil Rights and the Clery Act Compliance Team is of utmost importance.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you during the upcoming discussion on federal appropriations. We are confident that with your help we can improve the safety of students on our campuses across the country.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Dean Heller
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator