



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Full Committee Hearing:
Combating Sexual Harassment in Science
Wednesday, June 12, 2019

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing.

We are here today to grapple with a very tough challenge facing the scientific community. Sexual harassment and gender hostility in the sciences is not new. Women have long endured demeaning comments, professional sabotage, unwelcome sexual advances, and other offensive and hostile behavior during the course of their studies and research. Many have had to abandon their careers altogether.

This is a moral issue - one that demands action to ensure women have equal access to their career of choice. It is also an issue of our economic and national security. The public investment in research needs to draw on all of our nation's talent to return the best possible science for the benefit of society. To reach this goal, we must do more to ensure that all researchers have access to a safe work environment. It does no good to invest in programs to encourage more young girls to pursue STEM studies if they end up in a research environment that drives them away.

The historical tolerance of sexual harassment in the sciences is deeply rooted in institutional culture. The incentive structure within academia encourages a lack of transparency and accountability. It does less harm to an institution's reputation to allow a bad actor to quietly resign and often move on to another institution, than to do a full investigation that may result in a potentially embarrassing public finding. Successful researchers also bring in large grants for their institution. The loss of these researchers, and the funding that comes with them, would be a big blow to some institutions.

The incentive to keep quiet is also strong for the victims. It is far easier for a student or early-career researcher to keep quiet about her experience than to face the very real prospect of retaliation from her harasser and the harasser's colleagues. In science, a student's career prospects rely entirely on her research advisor. This strong disincentive is illustrated by the shockingly low rate of reporting by sexual harassment victims at universities. According to the

landmark 2018 report by the National Academies of Science on this topic, only 6 percent of graduate students and faculty who are sexually harassed formally report their experience to their institution.

There should no longer be any debate about the prevalence of sexual harassment in STEM and its consequences for U.S. leadership in science and innovation. The only discussion now should be about the most effective ways to address it. As the Science Committee, our responsibility lies in helping to ensure that Federal science agencies are doing their part. I commend the National Science Foundation for starting this conversation among the agencies and taking the first bold step with their new reporting requirement. I also commend the leadership of the scientific societies and the universities who have been trailblazers in taking concrete actions and sending a clear message of zero tolerance. Where you have led, others have followed.

Earlier this year I was joined by my good friend, Ranking Member Lucas, in introducing H.R. 36, the *Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act*. The bill draws upon recommendations made by the National Academies in their 2018 report. The bill also directs science agencies to follow NSF's lead by requiring their grantee institutions to report incidents of sexual harassment. Finally, the bill directs the Academies to conduct a follow-on study and to include a section on sexual harassment in its guide on responsible conduct in research.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists on what more is needed to make progress on this issue, as well as any potential improvements to H.R. 36 that should be considered as we move forward.