

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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January 29, 2024

The Honorable Arati Prabhakar
Director
White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Director Prabhakar,

We write today to conduct oversight of the implementation of the provisions pertaining to combating sexual harassment in science within the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022.¹ We are concerned that the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is not meeting critical deadlines to reduce sexual harassment in the federally funded scientific enterprise.

In 2017, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology (the Committee) began examining serious and broad allegations of sexual assault and harassment at scientific research facilities. After several individuals raised sexual harassment and assault claims against their former Boston University professor, the Committee began an investigation into sexual harassment and workplace misconduct in scientific fields.² Shortly following the announcement of this investigation, in February of 2018, the Committee held a hearing “to review sexual harassment and other workplace misconduct in science, learn how science agencies and research institutions handle complaints under current policy and law, assess the impact of harassment on women’s participation in science, and discuss recommendations for improving the complaint and resolution process as well as the culture in science.”³ Later that year, the National Academies of Science released a study that raised concerns specifically relating to the prevalence of sexual harassment in academic communities and across federal agencies. Their report discussed the classifications of

¹ [P.L. 117-167](#) (SUBTITLE D)

² House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, SST Committee Opens Bipartisan Investigation into Alleged Sexual Harassment by Boston University Professor, Press release, Oct. 26, 2017, <https://science.house.gov/press-releases?ID=9A7BCD6A-7C1C-4A92-B64A-CBB7E75DEE0E>

³ *Building a Safer Antarctic Research Environment Full Comm. Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Science, Space, and Tech.*, 117th Cong. (2022), <https://science.house.gov/2022/12/full-committee-hearing-building-a-safer-antarctic-research-environment>

sexual harassment and the likely situations in which it could arise and provided fifteen recommendations on how to address these issues.⁴

In response to these efforts, the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act was first introduced by then-Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson in 2018.⁵ The bill was cosponsored by now-Chairman Frank Lucas in 2019, and the final version was passed via the CHIPS and Science Act in the 117th Congress.⁶ Subtitle D of Title V of that law directs OSTP to establish or designate an interagency working group to coordinate federal research agency efforts to reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment involving federally funded researchers. It also directs OSTP to develop and implement uniform guidelines for Federal research agencies. This guidance will serve as the blueprint for the policies and procedures regarding sexual harassment across all federal research agencies. However, the impact will extend beyond federal agency employees to contractors, researchers, and other members of the science and technology enterprise. This congressionally mandated guidance demonstrates the commitment of the U.S. government to reducing instances of sexual harassment across all research environments, domestic and abroad.

While the Committee recognizes the care and attention a task of this importance requires, we are concerned that the prescribed deadlines have not been met. To inform our understanding of OSTP's progress toward implementation of Subtitle D of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022⁷, the Committee requests that you please provide written responses to the following questions no later than February 2, 2024.

1. Section 10536 of Subtitle D of the CHIPS and Science Act directs OSTP to “establish or designate an interagency working group” to coordinate efforts at federal research agencies to reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment. Which interagency working group is currently assigned the task of “coordinating Federal research agency efforts to reduce the prevalence of sex-based and sexual harassment involving award personnel?”
2. How has the designated interagency working group engaged with the following entities:
 - a. the working group on inclusion in STEM fields established under 42 U.S.C. 6626?
 - b. the Safe Inclusive Research Environments Subcommittee of the National Science and Technology Counsel?
 - c. representatives at each federal research agency?

⁴ NAT'L ACADEMIES PRESS, SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN: CLIMATE, CULTURE, AND CONSEQUENCES IN ACADEMIC SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE, 1-12, (PAULA A. JOHNSON, ET AL. 2018), <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24994/sexual-harassment-of-women-climate-culture-and-consequences-in-academic>

⁵ Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act of 2019, Sponsor Eddie Bernice Johnson and Frank Lucas, 116th Cong. 1st session, (2019).

⁶ CHIPS and Science Act, P.L. 116-167 (2022).

⁷ [P.L. 117-167](#), (SUBTITLE D)

- d. the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services?
 - e. the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education?
 - f. the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission?
3. Section 10536(a)(1) directs OSTP to submit an inventory of Federal research agency policies, procedures, and resources dedicated to preventing and responding to reports of sex-based and sexual harassment. Has OSTP completed this inventory?
- a. If not, when will the inventory be completed and submitted to the relevant congressional committees?
 - b. Please provide a detailed explanation for the year-long delay in meeting this Congressional directive.
4. Section 10536(a)(2) stipulates a six-month deadline after the submission of the inventory to develop a consistent set of policy guidelines for Federal research agencies. Will OSTP be able to meet this deadline given the year-long delay in the completion of the inventory? If not, when does OSTP anticipate completing the policy guidelines?
5. Does OSTP anticipate any additional delays in delivering on the full requirements mandated in Sec. 10536 of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022?

We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you on these important initiatives. If you have any questions, please contact Victoria Rubin of the Committee's Majority staff at (202) 225-6371 or Sara Palasits of the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375.

Sincerely,



Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology